

# MENDOCINO COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS

## Staff Report

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**TITLE: Authorization to Submit Application for Corridor Mobility Improvement Account (CMIA) Funding for Willits Bypass Project**      **DATE PREPARED: 12/29/06**  
**MEETING DATE: 01/08/06**

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**SUBMITTED BY: Phil Dow, Executive Director**

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### **BACKGROUND:**

As early as May, 2006 I alerted the Board that a bond package was being assembled by the Governor and Legislature that may be able to provide construction funding for our long-time highway improvement priority, the U.S. 101 bypass of Willits. Once agreement was reached, the California Transportation Commission began work in developing guidelines for the centerpiece of the transportation bond program, the Corridor Mobility Improvement Account. This \$4.5 billion program has certain criteria and deadlines established by the Legislature. Candidate projects must be submitted to the California Transportation Commission (CTC) by January 15, 2007 and the CTC must adopt a program prior to March 1, 2007.

The guidelines were assembled by the CTC in September after several months of meetings (over the summer) with a guidelines advisory committee. I was selected by the Rural Counties Task Force to be what turned out to be the lone rural representative on this committee. The committee finished its work in September; the guidelines were drafted in October, and then were adopted by the Commission in November.

There is separate information provided regarding the CMIA program and its intent. For the sake of brevity, its purpose is to provide for congestion relief in urban areas and to provide improved connectivity in rural areas. The adopted guidelines emphasize projects that are on Focus Routes that will be ready to go to construction prior to 2012. In order to be ready to go to construction early, projects need to be well along in the environmental process.

The U.S. 101 bypass of Willits meets the intent of the program very well. Not only does it provide for enhanced rural connectivity, but it is on one of only 10 Focus Routes in the state. And most importantly, it can be ready to go to construction as early as 2010. The long-awaited environmental process is now complete.

The CMIA application process is being conducted similar to the State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) process. Caltrans develops their own slate of candidate projects and the regional transportation planning agencies select their own candidate projects. The nominations are both due to the CTC on January 15, 2007. Caltrans has developed a draft statewide candidate list that recommends \$150 million for the Willits bypass project. The candidate submitted by District 1 earlier had been for the full funding gap to build the project: \$177 million. The gap in funding (\$27 million) would most likely have to come from additional STIP allocations in 2008. Since decisions are made at the headquarters level, I don't have complete insight as to why Caltrans would not pursue the full funding for this project. The CTC staff has stated repeatedly that the Commission wants to fund priority projects, regardless of size, and that Caltrans and regional agencies should ask for what they need.

I can think of no downside to requesting full funding from the California Transportation Commission for this project. Caltrans tells us that we have a funding gap of \$177 million; therefore we should request \$177 million. You now have a recommendation from the Technical Advisory Committee to that effect, passed at their meeting of December 20.

There was considerable discussion at the December MCOG meeting regarding what staff would be presenting for consideration by the Board at the January meeting. I was not in attendance, but did listen to the tapes. Since there was no action item, there was discussion generated among certain Board members regarding the facility to be built with the funding and whether a four-lane freeway is a "done deal". I can assure the Board that nothing is a "done deal" at this point other than a "No Build" option if we don't submit an application for funding.

We now have a completed environmental document for the project. The project is for a full-four lane project. So the answer is that a four-lane freeway will be built if the funding is obtained. If no additional funding is obtained, then nothing can be built. If for some reason we receive approximately 88% of what we need, we may have enough to complete the first phase of a staged construction project. Staging the project would be costly and would not make economic sense due to the incremental difference between staging and full construction.

MCOG has worked extensively with Caltrans District 1 to produce a CMIA application package. The draft package is attached. For all intents and purposes, if approved today, the MCOG CMIA application package would differ from the Caltrans package only by the amount requested for funding by CMIA. The Caltrans request as directed by headquarters is \$150 million; the MCOG request would be \$177 million.

Full funding for the Willits Bypass project was the #1 priority for CMIA projects in Caltrans District 1. This project is also supported by Humboldt County Association of Governments and the Del Norte County Transportation Commission. This project is identified as a priority in the Route 101 corridor plan entitled "Highway 101 Corridor – North of the Gate" that was jointly produced by the Marin, Sonoma and Mendocino RTPAs this fall. It was also recommended for full funding by the North State Super-Region, consisting of 12 RTPAs in northern California grouped by the CTC for the purpose of developing CMIA projects.

In advance of the January 8 agenda packet, I have sent the Board certain background information for review prior to the meeting. I trust it will be useful in focusing the meeting on the task at hand: seeking full funding for the project that is supported by the adopted environmental document.

In early 2006, MCOG voted to program \$14 million of 2006 STIP funding toward the right-of-way element. At that time it was thought that the best chance of funding would be in the 2008 STIP cycle. That thinking became modified when the bond program took shape and it became apparent that the Willits Bypass project was well suited to the CMIA program. Then our thinking was that the CMIA program was now the best chance of funding. Now, having gone through this process and thoroughly understanding the intent of the CTC guidelines, I believe this may be the **only** chance at obtaining the funds for our priority project. Construction costs have escalated so much in the past two years (universally) that it would be difficult to envision our ability to fund this project through the normal STIP process in the future.

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**ACTION REQUIRED:**

Adopt Resolution authorizing the Executive Director to submit application for full funding of the Willits Bypass Project.

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**ALTERNATIVES:**

Two alternatives have been identified:

1. Do not submit an application. (Not recommended)
2. Submit an application for partial funding (Not recommended)

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**RECOMMENDATION:**

Adopt Resolution authorizing the MCOG Executive Director to submit an application for full funding of the Willits Bypass project under the Corridor Mobility Improvement Account program.