

#8 Willits Bypass Project Responsiveness to CMIA Guidelines

The guidelines adopted by the California Transportation Commission are very specific regarding the candidate projects that are being sought for this program. This issue paper briefly identifies how the project addresses the intent of the program. It is arranged to correspond to the order of issues presented in the adopted guidelines.

Preamble: The Corridor Mobility Improvement Account (CMIA) presents a unique opportunity for the state's transportation community to provide demonstrable congestion relief, enhanced mobility, improved safety, and stronger connectivity to benefit traveling Californians.

- The project will relieve congestion, enhance mobility, improve safety (as well as reduce emergency response time) and improve connectivity in rural northwest California

CMIA Program Intent:

Mobility improvement and other project benefits. To include a project in the CMIA program, the Commission must find that it “improves mobility in a high-congestion corridor by improving travel times or reducing the number of daily vehicle hours of delay, improves the connectivity of the state highway system between rural, suburban, and urban areas, or improves the operation or safety of a highway or road segment.

- The project does improve travel times, reduce delay, improve operation, and improve safety. All these are very significant spot problems in the Willits area that are not really corridor-wide congestion concerns on Route 101. It does not reach the area-wide level of congestions prominent in some urban areas. The project is however extremely significant in improving the connectivity between rural, suburban and urban areas for an entire region of the state.

Geographic balance between regions. The Bond Act requires the program to be geographically balanced consistent with the north/south (40%/60%) split that applies to the STIP, and the Commission is to find that it “provides mobility improvements in highly traveled or highly congested corridors in all regions of California.

- The Willits Bypass project is the only CMIA candidate project on Highway 101 north of Windsor and is the only candidate in Mendocino, Humboldt, and Del Norte counties.

Early delivery. The Bond Act requires that funding be targeted “to provide the mobility benefit in the earliest possible timeframe.” Projects must be able to commence construction or implementation no later than December 31, 2012.

- The project is scheduled for construction in 2010.

Urban and Interregional Corridors. The Commission expects to evaluate urban corridor and interregional corridor improvements separately. The Commission expects CMIA improvements outside urbanized areas will be focused on Focus Routes identified in the Interregional Transportation Strategic Plan (ITSP).

- U.S. 101 is one of only ten identified “Focus Routes” in the ITSP

Evaluation of Project Benefits. The Commission intends to give priority to those projects that provide the greatest benefit in relationship to project cost, as demonstrated by a project nomination and supporting documents. The Commission will consider measurable benefits using the California Life-Cycle Benefit/Cost Analysis Model (Cal-B/C) developed and in use by Caltrans. The model, however, is but one measure of benefits, and the Commission will also consider other assessments of time savings, safety benefits, quantifiable air quality benefits, and other benefits identified in project nominations.

- A Benefit/Cost Analysis Input Sheet has been prepared that quantifies costs, traffic, and safety data. The format is not well suited to bypass projects, so other supporting information will be provided in the nomination package.

Local Funding Contribution. The Commission intends to also consider the contribution of local funding in the selection of projects for CMIA funding. The Commission's expectation of local funding may increase with the size of the project, the share of local traffic in the corridor, and the ability of the regional agency or a local implementing agency to contribute funding to the project.

- MCOG has no local sources to devote to this project, unlike many urban areas that have passed transportation sales tax measures. Most rural agencies are unable to contribute local funding. The resultant highway will separate through traffic from local traffic in Willits and be used minimally by local traffic due to the location of the interchanges. The facility will be used heavily by commuter traffic from Brooktrails to employment centers to the south.

Project Eligibility. A CMIA project must be on the state highway system or on a major access route to the state highway system on the local road system. The Commission must also find that: (a) the project either (1) reduces travel time or delay, (2) improves connectivity of the state highway system between rural, suburban, and urban areas, or (3) improves the operation or safety of a highway or road segment, (b) the project improves access to jobs, housing, markets, and commerce, and (c) the project can commence construction no later than December 31, 2012.

- The bypass project reduces travel time and delay as well as improves safety and operations. It will most likely be more competitive in the CMIA program because of improved connectivity aspects.
- The bypass will generally improve local access to jobs and housing ; there will be an opportunity for extensive improvement when combined with a second access to Brooktrails. Goods movement within and through Mendocino County to points north and south will be improved.
- The project is scheduled for construction in 2010.

Corridor system management plan. The Commission expects Caltrans and regional agencies to preserve the mobility gains of urban corridor capacity improvements over time and to describe how they intend to do so in project nominations. Projects in rural areas are not required to submit a corridor system management plan.

- Caltrans District 1, in coordination with District 4 (Bay Area) has prepared “Corridor management Plan – Route 101 – Golden Gate – Oregon Border” to respond to Commission requests. It identifies strategies for improvement and maintenance for the “lifeline of the North Coast” that extends from the urban south to the rural north.

Other funding sources. The Commission recognizes the important funding role that regional agencies play in implementing projects on the state system. The Commission may find it appropriate to develop full funding commitments to CMIA projects that take into consideration additional investments already made, or to be made, by agencies to enhance corridor mobility and connectivity. The Commission does not generally intend to program CMIA funding to replace funding already programmed in the STIP. The Commission does not intend to generally to program CMIA funding to cover cost increases for project components already programmed in the STIP. The Commission may consider the appropriateness of funding for the project from other Bond Act programs.

- This section was developed with transportation sales tax (Self-Help) counties in mind to permit switching funding sources if the intent of CMIA is enhanced in a particular congested urban corridor. It is not applicable to the bypass project since we have no other project in the vicinity and no other funding sources.
- Project cost increases for the bypass for environmental, design, and right-of-way have been programmed through the STIP. The construction phase has never been fully funded. The bulk of funding sought under CMIA to fill the gap in construction funding.
- This project best meets the intent of the CMIA program. Although the project may qualify for funding in the \$3.1 program for improvements on major trade routes, it is likely not to be competitive.