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Funding Allocated to Complete Bypass of Willits

At its meeting yesterday in Orinda, the California Transportation Commission (CTC) unanimously voted to allocate \$135.5 million to complete Phase 1 of the U.S. 101 Bypass of Willits project. Of this amount, over \$20 million came from Regional Improvement Program shares committed by Mendocino Council of Governments (MCOG).

This project has been MCOG's top priority for transportation capital improvements for decades. Surviving numerous pitfalls along the way, the CTC's approval yesterday is the culmination of efforts by a dedicated partnership. The many who deserve credit include MCOG's city and county members, Caltrans staff, Congressman Mike Thompson, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, North Coast Water Quality Control Board, Department of Fish & Game, and local businesses and individuals who have supported the project.

"We have long known of the substantial benefits that will come from this transportation project, such as reduced congestion, improved safety, environmental enhancements, and cleaner air," commented MCOG Executive Director Phil Dow. "What has become increasingly important is the anticipated five years of jobs that will result. Along with several other local infrastructure projects due to start up in the Willits area, this will benefit the community by stimulating the local economy in a big way." He further noted economists have long held that every dollar spent on infrastructure projects recirculates six times.

MCOG is responsible for allocating the regional share of transportation funds. \$17.3 million was programmed in 1998 for bypass construction, followed later by \$14 million toward right-of-way, and in March 2012, MCOG programmed \$2.1 million for cost increases. The source of funds for the CTC's most recent allocation is Proposition 1B bonds approved by voters under the Highway Safety, Traffic Reduction, Air Quality, and Port Security Bond Act of 2006.

MCOG formed as a joint powers agreement in 1972, as mandated by state law, to disburse state and federal funds for transportation, to provide regional planning, and to serve as a regional forum. MCOG is overseen by a board consisting of two county supervisors, a countywide public appointee, and one council member from each of the four incorporated cities. 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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