

Corridor Mobility Improvement Account Project Nomination Package

I authorize and approve the nomination of the Willits Bypass project for CMIA Funds.

Charlie Fielder *Date*
District Director
Caltrans - District 1

This project is co-nominated by the following organizations:

Phil Dow *Date*
Executive Director
Mendocino Council Of Governments (MCOG)

Tamera Buchanan *Date*
Executive Director
Del Norte Local Transportation Commission (DNLTCO)

Spencer Clifton *Date*
Executive Director
Humboldt County Area of Governments (HCAOG)

OVERVIEW

The Willits Bypass is nominated as a "connectivity" project in the rural area of Mendocino County. Although a Corridor Management Plan (CMP) is not a requirement of a rural connectivity project, a CMP is being developed by District 1, in partnership with all the regional transportation planning agencies on the North Coast, including Mendocino, Del Norte, and Humboldt. It is expected to be completed and approved in July 2007.

U.S. 101 spans the entire western coast of the United States between the Canadian and Mexican borders. It is a major interstate route and holds considerable importance to the North Coast of California. Often referred to as the "Lifeline of the North Coast", the Route 101 corridor between the Golden Gate Bridge and the Oregon Border is the only north/south principal arterial route west of Interstate 5. As a single route dependent region, the North Coast is heavily reliant on Route 101 for movement of goods, services and people. Route 101 is designated as a "High Emphasis/Focused Route" in the Interregional Transportation System Plan, and is one of the ten Focused Routes in the State.

Gaps in the freeway/expressway system along the corridor are the primary cause of congestion and delay on the interregional system. The remaining two major gaps in the freeway/expressway system on the Route 101 corridor are through the communities of Hopland and Willits, both within Mendocino County. The Willits Bypass project will improve the Route 101 corridor connectivity by completing a major gap in the interregional freeway/expressway system with the construction of a 4-lane freeway on a new alignment, bypassing the City of Willits. The benefits include reducing delay, improving safety and improving the Level of Service. Additionally, the project would improve the connectivity of Route 101 and facilitating the movement of goods and services in this region and result in improved economic conditions.

PROJECT BENEFITS

□ Connectivity

When traffic volumes were much lower, many communities north of San Francisco had Route 101 passing through the middle of town on surface streets. As traffic volumes increased over time, most of these communities have been bypassed or had access controlled freeways built through them. Willits is the only incorporated city between San Francisco and Eureka that continues to have Route 101 traversing the city on surface streets.

Route 101 is designated as a "High Emphasis" and "Focused Route" in the 1998 Interregional Transportation System Plan (ITSP). A "Focused Route" represents the corridors that are of highest priority for completion to minimum facility standards (freeway or expressway) to assure a statewide trunk system is in place for interregional trip movements. Approximately 80 percent of the Route 101 Corridor has been improved to meet the concept identified in the ITSP. With the construction of the Willits Bypass, approximately 6 miles of freeway will be added to the corridor. With the exception of a short segment of conventional highway in Hopland, there will be approximately 132 miles of continuous Freeway/Expressway from Willits south to the Golden Gate Bridge. (Hopland Bypass is currently in the environmental document study stage).

Safety

Construction of the Willits Bypass will offer several safety benefits including collision reductions, improved conditions for non-motorized traffic, and reduced exposure of the Willits community to vehicles transporting hazardous materials. The number of total collisions, is expected to decrease from a current rate of 1.83 per million vehicle miles on the existing facility to a rate of .40 on the freeway bypass. This is based on statewide average collision rates for similar facilities and represents a decrease of nearly 80 percent of total collisions (source: TASAS Table B Request). Various existing roadway conditions throughout the City of Willits present difficulties for bicyclists, pedestrians and other non-motorized traffic. Many segments of Route 101 through the project area have a wide roadway, and long and infrequent marked crosswalks. The difficulties in

crossing the multiple lanes of traffic are compounded by the sections of merging traffic, the two-way left-turn lane, and other turning movements. Additional conflicts for pedestrians and bicyclists arise in areas where on-street parking is also allowed. In particular, these issues make access within Willits difficult for less automobile-oriented groups such as children, the disabled and the elderly.

Like other vehicles, interregional commercial truck carrying hazardous materials must also travel through Willits, passing high-density residential areas, schools and businesses, posing further risk to the community. The redirection of such vehicles to the bypass will eliminate much of the risk to the community associated with their travel on local streets.

□ Environmental/Community Livability

Construction of the Willits Bypass will remove a significant amount of interregional traffic from the local road network in the City of Willits. This will benefit community livability by removing a major source of congestion and local travel delay, and will improve local traffic circulation overall in Downtown Willits. In addition, this will likely present many opportunities to improve non-motorized and transit facilities that may otherwise not have been possible (such as a reduction in number of lanes and/or addition of bike lanes) and has the potential to improve community cohesion.

Neighborhood stability in Willits will be enhanced by the removal of through-traffic and associated noise and congestion from neighborhood streets. As the Bypass draws traffic away from the existing Route 101, an improvement in the quality of life in Downtown Willits is expected, as measured by pedestrian accessibility and decreased congestion. Current traffic volumes separate east and west sides of the community. Because construction of the bypass would result in decreased traffic volumes along Main Street, community cohesion could increase. After construction of the bypass, a portion of the existing facility is expected to undergo the relinquishment process.

Livability will also be enhanced through improvements to air quality. The air quality study that was conducted for the alternatives considered in the EIR/EIS involved air quality modeling of Carbon Monoxide (CO) impacts of the bypass. The modeling methods included worst-case assumptions for meteorological conditions, so the results of the analyses yielded conservative results. The analysis yielded results between 3.0 and 4.0 parts per million (PPM), which is well below the California and National Ambient Air Quality Standard of 9.0 ppm. In addition to not increasing CO concentrations, the Bypass benefits the City of Willits by reducing exposure to diesel exhaust.

Diesel exhaust is an issue on facilities with large volumes of truck traffic. It is known that exposure to diesel exhaust over time can have effects on health. The existing route traverses the center of the city, which is primarily commercial with some residential areas. Three sensitive receptors have been identified along Route 101 through the city: Willits High School, Sanhedrin High School, and Howard Memorial Hospital. The trucks and automobiles that travel on this route are subject to continual stop and go traffic due to several traffic signals in town. It is known that diesel trucks will emit higher levels of emissions when the trucks stop and then start again.

□ Congestion Relief

In Mendocino County, Route 101 traverses the City of Willits where it also serves as main street. No other continuous street parallels Route 101 within the City of Willits. Traffic Congestion has been a concern within the City of Willits for a number of years, and has become more prevalent as traffic volumes have increased. The Route 101 segment through Willits remains a significant source of delay for interregional traffic. Northbound Route 101 approaching Route 20 in the City of Willits converts from four-lanes to two lanes resulting in a bottleneck effect, which causes traffic to back up. In addition, several access roads and driveways that intersect Route 101 cause

additional delay for local and interregional traffic flow. The average trip times on the existing facility through the project limits are 18.3 minutes. The projected trip times in 2028 for the no build are 32.3 minutes. With the project, trip times would be 9.4 minutes. Traffic conditions in this region are anticipated to increase as the population of California increases.

COORDINATION WITH LOCAL PARTNERS

- North Coastal Counties Supervisor Association (NCCSA)

For the past several decades the North Coastal Counties Supervisors Association, a group of seven Northern California and Southern Oregon Counties, have recognized Route 101 as the highest priority for improvements and have identified the Willits Bypass as the highest priority, followed by the Hopland Bypass, as a critical gap.

- RTPA Support

The Willits Bypass project has long been identified as a top priority by the Mendocino Council of Government (MCOG) in their Regional Transportation Plan. MCOG programmed its entire \$17.3 million share of 1998 Regional Improvement Program (RIP) Funds to the Willits Bypass project, and an additional \$14.0 million of RIP Funds in the 2006 STIP cycle towards Willits Right of Way. Most recently, MCOG completed a study in coordination with the Sonoma County Transportation Authority and the Transportation Authority of Marin, identifying critical improvement projects within the Route 101 Corridor North of the Golden Gate through Mendocino County (see attached). Although improvements were not prioritized in this report, the Willits Bypass project was identified as one of the critical gaps within the corridor.

MCOG supports the CMIA application for the Willits, and anticipates submitting a co-sponsored application along with the Del Norte Local Transportation Commission and the Humboldt County Area of Governments. In addition, the North State Super-Region has supports the Willits Bypass project and will be submitting a letter of support.

- Wine Country Interregional Partnership (WCIRP)

The Wine Country Interregional Partnership consists of the four counties of Mendocino, Lake, Napa and Sonoma, along with Caltrans Districts 1 and 4. The WCIRP is pursuing the development of a four County transportation-land use, multi-phased model which will provide useful and reliable traffic forecasting for the Wine Country Region.

COSTS/SCHEDULE RISK

Approval on the EIR/EIS for the Willits Bypass Project was achieved on December 18, 2006. The current schedule for this project establishes RTL on July 15, 2009. Schedule risks include preparation of the Final Mitigation and Monitoring Plan, right of way acquisition, obtaining the necessary resource agency permits, and any unanticipated changes to its current design. Right of way maps are under preparation and approximately one-third have been completed. A Conceptual Mitigation Plan has been prepared through coordination with the resource agencies and monthly meetings are being scheduled to develop the Final Mitigation and Monitoring Plan. Coordination with these agencies will continue as this plan is developed and this is anticipated to facilitate application and issuance of the resource agency permits. At risk design was initiated early in the process and is on-going. The design is estimated to be currently 75% complete for structures and 50% complete overall. Total cost of the project assumed an escalation rate of 4.1% per year, which is based on historic trend of the the California Construction Cost Index (CCCI) and the North Region Construction Cost Database