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Infrastructure bonds OK'd for roads, schools, levees

\$42.5 billion investment will be used to fix decaying public works

By Steven HarmonMEDIANEWS SACRAMENTO BUREAU
Inside Bay Area

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Voters appeared poised to put a down payment on the future Tuesday — a

\$42.5 billion investment in overhauling the state's aging and creaking highways, schools, levees and housing stock.

All five infrastructure bonds on the ballot appeared on their way to victory Tuesday night, though the bond to improve water quality — Proposition 84 — was barely leading.

If final results hold, the state will embark on its most expansive — and expensive — infrastructure improvements in more than 40 years, with \$19.9 billion going for transportation and transit projects, \$10.4 billion for school construction, \$5.4 billion for clean water and other environmental protections, \$4.1 billion for flood protection, and \$2.85 billion for affordable housing.

"Fiscally, voters have been cantankerous about bond measures over the years," said Ethan Rarick, director of the Center on Politics at UC Berkeley Institute of Governmental Studies, who wrote the biography of former Gov. Pat Brown, who led the state's last major infrastructure investment. "But this time they were offered a chance for a major investment in their own future and they may have taken it."

Proposition 1B

The nine-county Bay Area region could see up to \$4.5 billion from the \$20 billion transportation bond, which will be key to repairing and building the transportation networks needed for a growing population. The largest of the four legislatively-approved bond measures, Proposition 1B would relieve traffic congestion, improve air quality and enhance the safety and security of the transportation system.

The \$19.9 billion will cost nearly \$40 billion over 30 years to repay, which opponents say will require massive tax increases. About half the money will be distributed through existing spending formulas, and half will be given out as grants to local transportation agencies based on their needs.

For the nine-county region, the bond sets aside \$375 million for local streets and roads, \$348 million in State Transportation Improvement Program money and \$1.3 billion for mass transit.

The region will also likely receive as much as \$2.5 billion in grants based on population and current spending needs, according to the MTC.

Local governments will determine where most of the money will be spent, though \$1 billion is earmarked for improving Highway 99 in the Central Valley. Heading the regional wish list are projects to build the fourth bore of the Caldecott Tunnel and making improvements to Highway 4, Interstates 80, 580, 680 and 880 and Vasco Road.

Proposition 1C

Proponents argued that affordable housing for the poor was a vital infrastructure need that will benefit tens of thousands of the most vulnerable.

The \$2.85 billion affordable housing measure would pay for affordable rental housing and shelters for poor seniors, the disabled, battered women and their children, veterans and farmworker families.

It would help fund low-interest construction loans to build low-income apartments and houses near existing transit stations, parks and infill incentive grants. For higher density housing near transit stations, it would fund water and sewer expansions and environmental cleanup.

Half of the money — \$1.4 billion — would extend existing programs created under Prop. 46, a \$2.1 billion bond voters approved in 2002. That bond has gone to programs such as the one to help build low-income apartments in Bay Point, a Habitat for Humanity project in Livermore, and a Richmond homeless shelter.

Proposition 1D

More than 40,000 classrooms in the state will get repairs or rebuilt under the \$10.4 billion school bond measure, which held a slim margin in early returns.

The measure will give \$7.3 billion to fix or rebuild elementary, middle and high schools, 7,000 of which the Division of the State Architect deemed seismically unsafe. School districts would have to apply for up to 50 percent of costs of eligible projects from a fund overseen by the State Allocation Board.

Higher education would get \$3.1 billion, and community colleges about \$1.5 billion.

Proposition 1E

The state's dilapidated levees — some built more than 100 years ago — would get a boost with the \$4.1 billion bond. The money will go toward flood prevention projects that will protect towns and suburbs and a major water supply for about 23 million people.

But, it is not necessarily a boon for the Delta because the bulk of the money is likely to go toward shoring up levees that protect neighborhoods in Sacramento and other cities upstream of the Delta.

Still, Delta towns, highways and other public infrastructure could benefit.

"I'm reasonably optimistic," said Dante John Nomellini Sr., a lawyer for the Central Delta Water Agency and several Delta reclamation districts. "It's not a foregone conclusion that we won't get any."

Proposition 84

Proposition 84, the \$5.4 billion parks and water bond, would provide money for flood control and water quality, along with funds for new parks, creek restoration and other environmental programs.

MediaNews Staff writers Mike Taugher, Kiley Russell, Shirley Dang, and Lisa Vorderbrueggen contributed to this story.