

CONTRA COSTA TIMES

Posted on Sun, Nov. 12, 2006

EDITORIAL

Californians invest big in their future

CALIFORNIA IS ABOUT to move ahead with the largest investment in its basic infrastructure since the Pat Brown administration. The bold move forward comes thanks to passage of all of the bond measures, promoted by Republican Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger and Democratic leaders in the Legislature.

That means the state will have about \$42.7 billion to spend on highways, mass transit, schools, water projects, parks and affordable housing.

Nearly three-fourths of the money will be used where it is needed most, on transportation and schools.

The largest of the bond measures, Proposition 1B won overwhelming approval with 61.3 percent of the vote. It will make \$19.9 billion available for a variety of transportation projects.

Half the money will be distributed through existing spending formulas, and half will be given out as grants to local transportation agencies.

The nine-county Bay Area will get \$375 million for local streets and roads, \$348 million in State Transportation Improvement Program money and \$1.3 billion for mass transit.

Also, the area will receive as much as \$2.5 billion in grants based on population and current spending needs, according to the Metropolitan Transportation Commission.

Under Prop. 1B, local governments will decide where most of the money will be spent. Heading the regional wish list are: a fourth bore of the Caldecott Tunnel and improvements to Highway 4, Interstates 80, 580, 680 and 880 and Vasco Road.

Many of these projects will get under way quickly because contracts are already in the works.

The second largest bond, Prop. 1D, will provide \$10.4 billion for school facilities. There will be \$7.3 billion to fix or rebuild elementary, middle and high schools. Universities will get \$3.1 billion, and community colleges will get about \$1.5 billion.

Prop. 1E will allot \$4.1 billion for flood prevention projects that will protect towns and suburbs and a major water supply for about 23 million people.

Prop. 1C makes \$2.85 billion available for affordable housing projects, which could provide homes for tens of thousands of lower-income Californians.

In addition to the four infrastructure bonds promoted by the governor, voters passed Prop. 84, a \$5.4 billion bond measure to finance a number of water quality, water supply and flood-protection projects, mostly in the Central Valley.

Several of these measures appeared to be in trouble not long before the election. But when the time for decision came, voters were in a generous mood. That is good news for California's future.

For too long, California has failed to keep up with basic infrastructure needs in a fast-growing state. With skyrocketing construction costs, it is critical for California to move ahead quickly on its infrastructure projects.

That is why it was so fortunate that voters approved the bond funding, making money available now. Waiting to pay as we go could have ended up costing the state more than the interest that will be paid on the bonds.

Also, the projects would have lagged far behind state needs.

It is unlikely that any other state in the nation would be able to raise \$42.7 billion in a single election. But voters showed California is different and is willing to make a major investment in its future.

That is among the most positive outcomes of Tuesday's election.