

Lets get moving on I-580, 680

Column by Tim Hunt
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THE voters overwhelming support of the two transportation measures on the Nov. 7 ballot should be great news for anyone using Interstate 580 through the Livermore Valley.

As the second and third worst congested route (afternoon and morning measurements) in the entire nine-county Bay Area, it must be a top priority. It is one of the few routes that mixes commute traffic with heavy truck traffic.

The truck traffic primarily is coming from San Joaquin Valley distribution centers to Bay Area retailers, although theres also a healthy mix of container traffic using the Port of Oakland.

Fortunately, there are three different pots of money in the state bond specifically for use on inter-regional routes such as I-580 and I-205 through Tracy.

Thanks to the hard work of the Tri-Valley Business Council, Assemblyman Guy Houston, Supervisor Scott Haggerty and other regional business organizations, decision-makers will hear one consistent voice pushing improvements from the Port of Stockton to the Port of Oakland covering Interstates 5, 205, 580, 238 and 880.

The coalition grew out of the business councils transportation summit in April, a move that was driven by Houstons efforts to get the Valley to speak with one voice.

Whats critical now is for the three Livermore Valley cities and Alameda County to get the long-awaited triangle study finished. The study examines Interstates 580 and 680 along with Highway 84 to evaluate what overall improvements will make the most difference.

That wont hold up getting the I-580 improvements into the bond program, but it should shed lots of light about the relative value of key improvements like widening Highway 84 or extending Stoneridge Drive so it connects Livermore and Pleasanton.

One item that should also be on the table is opening the car-pool lanes to motorists willing to pay tolls during peak commute hours. Allowing single-occupant motorists to pay to use the lanes during peak hours will create a revenue stream that can be used for additional improvements as well as maximizing use of the lanes.

The other huge challenge in the I-580 corridor is the future of BART and the long-planned extension to Livermore. Current plans call for buying right-of-way along the corridor for what remains a very expensive solution.

The focus now correctly is on the freeway improvements, but BART alignment also is in the picture. Once the

I-580 car-pool lanes are finished then express buses become a viable alternative to move BART passengers from Livermore to the Dublin-Pleasanton station.

Extending BART to Livermore, something Livermore residents have been paying for since the system was established in the 1960s, is enormously expensive at more than \$100 million per mile in construction costs alone.

It must go to the site BART owns on Greenville Road to have an effect on San Joaquin commuter traffic and even then, given the nature of the Bay Area economy today with jobs dispersed all over, its questionable how effective it will be on lessening traffic.

For some poor soul who lives in Manteca and works in downtown San Francisco, it would be wonderful, but not for a Mantecan who wants to go to Milpitas.

Backers have touted the ACE train interface and transportation hub at the foot of the Altamont Pass, but three trains during morning commute hour hardly move lots of folks to fill up BART trains.

Given the extreme cost of BART and its very high operating costs, elected leaders must ask the hard questions to prioritize precious transportation dollars.

Of course, given the choice between BART to Livermore and the absurdly expensive bullet train from L.A. to San Francisco, bring on BART.

Tim Hunt is the former editor and associate publisher of the Tri-Valley Herald. He can be contacted at tim--hunt2@comcast.net.