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Tauscher 'troubled' by transportation funding

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Reaction to an announcement late last week that California transportation officials would not recommend the Interstate 80, I-680 interchange for state bond funding has spread to the federal level.

Rep. Ellen Tauscher, D-Solano, issued a statement late Friday saying congestion relief must be a top priority in determining how to spend billions of dollars in state bond money approved by voters last November.

California Transportation Commission staffers issued a tentative list Friday afternoon of which projects they believe should receive some of the \$4.5 billion Proposition 1B funds available. The staffers recommended \$2.8 billion worth of projects, including improvements to Highway 12 through Jameson Canyon. But missing from the list was proposed Phase 1 work for improvements to the I-80 and I-680 interchange at Cordelia.

"I am convinced that the best use of these one-time bond funds is to benefit California's economy and the people who drive that economy, and that means delivering the most congestion relief possible," Tauscher said of the tentative list. "It troubles me that a project as vital as improving I-80/I-680/Highway 12, that will relieve congestion and connect our growing region was left off this list of staff recommendations, while other projects that made the list are very expensive and in areas with much less traffic congestion. It really just doesn't make sense to me."

Saying that the Bay Area is the second-most congested place in America, and endures 85 percent of the congestion in the northern portion of the state, Tauscher said the Bay Area is an "economic engine" and delivers more than one-third of the state's general fund reserves - "funds that will be used to repay" the bonds.

The Bay Area's senior member of the U.S. House's Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, she vowed to see that more work is done to provide funding for the interchange before the Feb. 28 California Transportation Commission meeting at which a final decision on the bond funds is supposed to be made.

"The staff of the California Transportation Commission was given a tight time-line from the Legislature, and it is clear that a lot more work needs to be done these next two weeks," she said. "I will work with the commissioners to develop a list that addresses congestion in the Bay Area, benefits California's economy and commuters, and serves as a stepping stone for future investment."

The CTC staff recommendations are to be presented to the full CTC board today.