


Transportation Bond Money Sent To Rural Areas

Is The Bay Area Getting Shortchanged?

 By Laura Anthony

Jan. 31 - KGO - Bay Area business leaders are crying foul over a Caltrans' plan to send hundreds of millions of dollars in transportation money to rural communities like Willits and Shasta, instead of using it to ease congestion in places like the Interstate 80 corridor here in the Bay Area, where there's ten times more traffic.

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Local leaders complain if Caltrans has its way, the Bay Area will get shortchanged on state bond money earmarked for traffic congestion relief.

Jim Wunderman, Bay Area Council: "According to Caltrans' own figures, 85 percent of the congestion in Northern California is actually in the Bay Area."

The concerns come after Caltrans released its list of projects the agency recommends for the first wave of Proposition 1B funds -- a \$20 billion dollar transportation bond passed by voters last November.

Therese McMillan, Metropolitan Transportation Commission: "We believe this particular fund source was really targeted in the legislative language for highly-congested, urban related corridors."

Caltrans did designate \$1.4 billion dollars of the initial \$1.8 billion dollar Northern California portion to Bay Area projects, like expanding the Caldecott Tunnel, improving San Francisco's Doyle Drive, the cramped I-80 corridor and the highways that serve the Napa Valley. But much of the remaining money would go to rural areas like Willits, a town of 5,000, that would get \$150 million dollars to complete a bypass on Highway 101.

Jim Wunderman: "It's not that it isn't important and that there isn't traffic up in Willits on busy days, but it pales by comparison to the kind of traffic that's being experienced in roads like 880, 580 and 101 in the Bay Area."

Bay Area officials say they don't mean to pick on Willits. They just think the transportation bond money should go to the places with the most congestion. Caltrans spokesperson Lauren Wonder insists the Bay Area will get its fair share.

Lauren Wonder, Caltrans Spokesperson: "880, 80 -- 80 is the most highly congested. Route 4, Caldecott Tunnel, those are all being addressed."

Not Caltrans, but the State Transportation Commission, will make the final project decisions at the end of next month.

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