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Mayor expects traffic fix speedup

Election result seen aiding local projects

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The Democratic takeover of Congress and the passage of the state's infrastructure bond bode well for Los Angeles and efforts to improve the quality of life for its residents, Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa said Thursday.

At a news conference to trumpet the success of a year-old program designed to ease congestion at 35 busy intersections, Villaraigosa said he expects the city to benefit greatly from the outcome of Tuesday's election.

"I already met with new Speaker Nancy Pelosi - it's nice to be able to say that - and talked about the needs of the major cities," Villaraigosa said at a news conference in the city's ATSAC Center, the nerve center of the Department of Transportation.

"I think with Democrats in charge, there will be a greater understanding of the needs to rebuild the infrastructure. I plan to be there to let them know what we need."

Villaraigosa said he also has talked with Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, who assured him the city will get the \$4.5 billion that is earmarked for Los Angeles in the Proposition 1B infrastructure bond.

"What this means is that we can extend the car-pool lane on the 405, we can work on the 'subway to the sea,' we can get more buses out there and expand the busway in the San Fernando Valley," he said.

"There is no one single silver bullet that is going to solve our traffic problems, but we have to bring all these together to make a start.

"And the public is going to have to help. They are going to have to get out of their cars one day a week. We have to have better planning along transit corridors and allow for increased density in areas like downtown."

During the news conference, Villaraigosa also declared that Operation Bottleneck, launched in January to ease congestion on surface streets, had been a success.

From the DOT's command center in the bowels of City Hall, technicians monitor 35 intersections and adjust the signals to keep traffic moving.

The mayor said the program has reduced traffic delays by one-third - which equates to 670 hours a day and more than 244,000 hours a year that are not spent idling in traffic.

Councilwoman Wendy Greuel, who chairs the council's Transportation Committee, said congestion is her constituents' No. 1 complaint.

"There is nothing more frustrating than driving along and hitting stoplight after stoplight," Greuel said. "Today is a new day - a day when traffic congestion is finally being addressed. There is no greater quality-of-life issue for our residents."

Under the program, the technicians are alerted as soon as traffic backs up at an intersection, the monitor is directed to it and a determination is made on what action is needed.

DOT General Manager Gloria Jeff said the technicians can change the traffic signal pattern or dispatch emergency vehicles to respond to any situation.

"This is one of a number of small steps the city is taking," Villaraigosa said.

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