



# Inland News

## Bond funds turbo-boost road projects' chances



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The Press-Enterprise

An infusion of Prop. 1B bond money has boosted the amount of transportation funds available from a state program that pays for road construction to levels not seen since the late 1990s, Riverside County officials said Wednesday.

The State Transportation Improvement Program typically provides more than \$1 billion for road, mass transit and other projects every two years. However, a state budget crisis crippled the program in 2004, reducing money available statewide to \$8 million.

The amount of money available in the 2006 cycle was expected to creep back up to \$1.9 billion statewide, but the passage of Prop. 1B, the \$19.9 billion transportation bond issue approved in November, kicked that into a higher gear.

The bond measure includes \$2.6 billion in extra money for the State Transportation Improvement Program process, meaning the 2006-07 cycle actually will equate to \$4.5 billion.

That is the most money the program has had since 1998, when the state put in \$4.6 billion for the two-year funding cycle.

Riverside County should receive about \$168 million in highway funding and \$22 million in mass-transit funds when the California Transportation Commission approves the program in June, according to Shirley Medina, a program manager with the Riverside County Transportation Commission.

The commission Wednesday approved a list of proposed projects that would be built with the money.

The program calls for spending:

\$23.8 million not already allotted by the state to widen Interstate 215 between Interstate 15 and Scott Road in Murrieta;

\$22.8 million for extending that project north to Nuevo Road;

\$31.5 million for on- and offramps at Interstate 15 and French Valley Parkway;

\$7.8 million for planning a truck-only lane on Interstate 10 near Beaumont; and

\$11.9 million for planning a new interchange at highways 91 and 71 in Corona.

Such road projects also are receiving an inadvertent boost from an earlier section of Prop. 1B that allotted money to lessen congestion on major traffic corridors.

That process, which culminated Feb. 28, included \$157 million for a carpool lane on Highway 91 between Adams Street and the 60/91/215 interchange in Riverside.

Obtaining that \$157 million through the congestion-relief program frees up money the transportation agency already had set aside, so that money can be used elsewhere around the county, according to Eric Haley, the commission's executive director.

"We have a lot of moving parts," Haley said.

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