



## Editorial: Stop dallying on Hwy. 118

### Panel should OK funding

The California Transportation Commission should reward efficiency and save taxpayer money by approving \$32 million for Highway 118 widening costs in Simi Valley.

The Star joins local officials in urging the state commission to allocate the money for Highway 118 when it meets Thursday.

Among those officials who have sent letters in support of the funding or plan on making the case in person at this week's hearings are state Sens. Sheila Kuehl, D-Santa Monica, and Tom McClintock, R-Thousand Oaks; and Assembly members Cameron Smyth, R-Santa Clarita, Audra Strickland, R-Moorpark, Julia Brownley, D-Santa Monica, and Pedro Nava, D-Santa Barbara.

The politicians and local transportation officials have sound arguments to back up their position, namely, ground was broken for the highway project in April and to delay widening to 2011 will end up costing taxpayers millions more.

Star reporter Scott Hadly reported Tuesday that the Highway 118 work was planned back in 1998, but delayed in 2003 because of the state budget crisis.

When the commission voted in 2006 to spend \$50 million on the entire project, it was no longer enough, due to rising construction costs.

To deal with the problem, local officials, working with the California Department of Transportation, split the project into two phases the first phase to add a fourth eastbound lane from Tapo Canyon Road to Kuehner Drive, widen four bridges and build a soundwall.

The second phase would widen the other side of the highway, build another soundwall and add traffic signals.

When voters approved Proposition 1B bonds last year, local officials asked that the state approve the Phase 2 costs of the Highway 118 widening \$32 million.

In April, the California Transportation Commission staff recommended against the Phase 2 funding, perhaps believing the second phase of the project was "new" and so should go to the back of the line.

Once the commissioners understand why the project was split into two phases, they will see there is nothing new about this widening plan.

Ginger Gherardi, executive director of the Ventura County Transportation Commission, wrote last month to James C. Ghielmetti, chairman of the California Transportation Commission, that the actual cost could be lower than the \$32 million estimate because "there is a contractor already mobilized on site." In addition, she wrote: "By not funding the project now, the net result will be to waste millions of limited state dollars, paying for escalated costs, remobilization and prolonging construction zones for the public to drive through. On the other hand, if we build this project now, we can put the voter-approved Proposition 1B funds to immediate use rather than waiting for projects which are several years away from construction."

Highway 118 widening has been delayed long enough. The Star urges the California Transportation Commission to take the most economical route by ensuring full and timely funding of phases 1 and 2.



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