

March 5, 2013

Michael Dougherty
Director
California Department of Transportation
1120 N Street
Sacramento, CA 94273-0001

Dear Director Dougherty:

Caltrans is about to begin the construction phase of a project of great importance to my district that was proposed 50 years ago. The Willits Bypass has been promoted as a safe, sensibly sized and environmentally friendly project that will relieve congestion on Highway 101 through Willits. Local residents and their representatives have spent much time working with Caltrans and regulatory agencies to ensure the success of this project. I do not know of anyone who does not support an alternative, including myself.

Unfortunately, as facts about the selected project become more widely known, opposition is mounting. It is disconcerting when after all these years many ranchers, farmers, local businesses, environmental groups and ordinary citizens agree that the Willits Bypass, as it is presently conceived, should not be built.

My office has been contacted by constituents who are feel that concerns about the project have gone unanswered by Caltrans, and that it is being built based on faulty and outdated information. Among the questions and my concerns:

- In 2008, the California Transportation Commission, refused to fund a four lane project as proposed by Caltrans. Caltrans quickly redesigned the project for two lanes, with grading to add two additional lanes at some later date. There is no funding for a future expansion and the need to expand is questionable since traffic counts have over the years continued to remain steady or declined. I have been asked why Caltrans is spending millions of dollars to expand the project's footprint and adding thousand of ton of fill to wetlands, to prepare for what appears to be an unfunded and unneeded future expansion?
- Caltrans has clearly stated in its environmental documents that a two lane project does not meet the "purpose and operational need of the project," yet this is the project that is going forward. Because of Caltrans insistence on a four lane project, two lane alternatives were summarily rejected and not examined in the EIR/EIS. How can we determine whether the current two lane project is the superior project?
- The two lane Willits Bypass consists of 6 miles of raised roadbed, including several curves and a mile of viaduct and raising to a maximum height of 30 feet. The Bypass will not have a medium barrier and no emergency access. Is this project safer than current conditions? Local officials have asked why Caltrans is building a project that can only be made safer by spending millions more for an additional two lanes that serve no other need?

- Local residents say that much of the traffic in the City of Willits could be effectively relieved through traffic management programs at the Highway 20 intersection. Why is this not considered as a partial solution to the problem, especially since about 70 percent of current Highway 101 traffic through Willits is locally bound?

- There is a perception that Caltrans has refused to seriously look at other two lane alternatives. Has the agency thoroughly examined the Baechtel Road-Railroad Avenue Corridor, a route through Willits' eastside industrial area that was initially the focus of a 2004 community-led study funded by Caltrans? Some participants in this study say that the route is a viable alternative for through-town traffic which avoids wetlands. This route has tremendous popular support, avoids environmental problems and could save taxpayers millions of dollars in scarce transportation funds. Are there reasons why it shouldn't be seriously examined?

I look forward to the opportunity to meet with you and your staff to discuss the Willits Bypass, and address these issues that have been raised by my constituents. I understand the need and fully support an alternative transportation solution, and am willing to work with you for a project that addresses the transportation needs of Willits and the region.

Sincerely,

NOREEN EVANS
Senator 2nd District