

STAFF REPORT

SUBJECT: Route 246 Widening Project

MEETING DATE: July 20, 2006

AGENDA ITEM: 6 E

STAFF CONTACT: Jim Kemp

RECOMMENDATION:

Direct staff to include a policy in the updated Regional Transportation Plan providing priority programming consideration for future STIP funding for the Route 246 widening project.

DISCUSSION:

At its June 20 meeting, the SBCAG board unanimously adopted the Measure D renewal expenditure plan. The board incorporated some changes to the draft plan to help ensure support from all members. One of the changes involved increasing the amount of Measure D funding allocated for three interchange improvement projects in Santa Maria by a total of \$10 million and reducing the amount of Measure D funding for the Route 246 Widening project by a like amount. Staff noted that the \$10 million reduction for the 246 widening project could be potentially backfilled using other funds including the county's future allocations of STIP or RSTP funding. The adopted expenditure plan includes \$33 million in Measure D regional funding for the 246 widening project which has a preliminary cost estimate of \$63 million. Like many of the projects included in the expenditure plan, state and/or federal funding will be required to complete the 246 widening. Given the amount of funding required to fully fund the project, it is likely that STIP funding will be needed.

Mayor DeeWees has expressed concern that the state/federal matching funds will not be available when needed to construct the 246 project (see attached letter). Although the board is not permitted to commit future boards to take specific actions, the board may express its intentions through the adoption of a non-binding policy. To address the concerns expressed by the Mayor, staff is recommending that the board adopt the following policy:

The Route 246 Widening project shall be given priority consideration for STIP funding when needed for construction.

If so directed by the board, this programming policy would be included in the next update of the Regional Transportation Plan scheduled for adoption in November 2006. The policy would be contingent upon the passage of Measure D in the November 2006 election.

COMMITTEE REVIEW: None



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June 21, 2006

Members of the Board of Directors and Staff
Santa Barbara County Association of Governments

Joe Centeno, Chairperson
Supervisors Salud Carbajal, Susan Rose, Brooks Firestone, and Joni Gray
Jim Kemp, Executive Director
Russ Hicks, City of Buellton
Donna Jordan, City of Carpinteria
Jonny Wallis City of Goleta
Lupe Alvarez, City of Guadalupe
Marty Blum, City of Santa Barbara
Marty Mariscal, City of Santa Maria
Ed Skytt, City of Solvang

Dear Chairman Centeno, Board Members, and Staff:

At the April 20, 2006 meeting of SBCAG, in order to help win the endorsement of the Measure D renewal from the cities of Santa Maria and Goleta, the City of Lompoc relinquished \$10 million of funding earmarked for the construction of improvements for State Highway 246. It appeared to be in the best interest of the Measure D renewal effort to do so, as we needed the support of the two aforementioned cities, and the construction phase of the Highway 246 project is still some years in the future. At that meeting I received assurances from some Board Members and staff that the \$10 million would be available for the construction improvements when the time came, either through RSTP or STIP funds. After the SBCAG meeting of June 15, 2006, I am beginning to have my doubts regarding what I perceived to be a commitment from the Board and staff, and feel that I may live to regret the action taken by the City of Lompoc at the April 20th meeting.

The money currently programmed for construction of the Highway 246 project is in Measure D. The State has had problems creating any new funding capacity in the STIP over the past three years. Will this funding problem change in the foreseeable future? Probably not. Furthermore, any new funding capacity that becomes available in the STIP in the future will likely be used to fund the Highway 101 project. Therefore, relying on some vague promise by SBCAG staff that the Board will backfill the Highway 246 project with the STIP is risky at best. The RSTP program has proved to be a stable funding source that can be relied upon. These funds have not experienced the shortfalls that have plagued STIP funds, and may also be swapped for state money.

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At the June 15th meeting I asked for some assurance that the funds would be there and was told, "We don't want to tie the hands of future Boards." That did not go down very well with me, as we commit future Boards to spend future monies every month. Isn't that what we are doing with Measure D funding?

All that I am asking is for the SBCAG Board and staff to come up with some mechanism, perhaps something along the lines of a "Resolution of Intent", that states that the \$10 Million that the City of Lompoc gave away in the spirit of cooperation will be there when the time for the construction phase of Highway 246 is ready to begin. Surely some way can be found to make this happen, and provide a sense of equity for the citizens of the Lompoc Valley.

My hope is that you will give this matter serious consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Dick DeWees". The signature is stylized and cursive, with a large initial "D" and "W".

Dick DeWees
Mayor
City of Lompoc