

Interstate 5 needs to be improved for area's growth

It is the worst of times: we are experiencing an economic downturn likened to the Great Depression. It is the best of times: Shasta County, Redding, Anderson, and Shasta Lake are in the best position to add major transportation infrastructure that will benefit us for the next 50 years. President Obama's stimulus package emphasizing infrastructure, along with state and local transportation projects already under way are making that possible.

At the heart of those infrastructure projects runs Interstate 5. Looking at photos from 1970, I-5 has been at the center of Shasta County's unprecedented growth over the past 40 years.

Shasta County Regional Improvement Program (SCRIP-FIX 5) presents a comprehensive package for dealing with our county's pressing infrastructure needs from expanding Interstate 5 to addressing overpass and interstate interchange upgrades. Nine needed interchange improvements to Interstate 5 will be addressed by the SCRIP-FIX 5 program.

Shasta County is not alone in facing transportation challenges; 19 California Counties, representing 83 percent of the State's population, have serious transportation congestion and infrastructure needs; virtually all have

voted to institute local "self help" measures and traffic impact fees to improve their transportation infrastructure. Those county- and city-elected officials have come to the unavoidable conclusion that local funds have to be part of the solution and that the state and federal government will not solve all their transportation needs.

There are certain voices in Shasta County that oppose SCRIP-FIX 5. They will tell you supporting SCRIP-FIX 5 will kill new development but, in fact, the opposite is true. Evidence shows that heavy congestion with stop-and-go traffic are disincentives for new companies and residents coming to a community.

Who should pay for the infrastructure improvements for I-5? We believe that existing tax payers and new residential and commercial development should pay. Here is how the \$230 million I-5 expansion costs are to be funded: 5 percent from a development impact fee; 45 percent from state gas tax revenues through the State Transportation Improvement Program generated by all who drive; and 50 percent from state and federal discretionary grants.

Contrary to opposing voices, the SCRIP-FIX 5 program is only asking new development to pay for 5 percent of the I-5 expansion, which

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will then leverage the 95 percent funding from state and federal resources.

It was developers, construction and business interests who initially lobbied for I-5 to go through our local towns 50 years ago; ironically, they are the ones opposing the I-5 expansion even though they have economically benefitted the most.

There are certain voices in Shasta County that will tell you that a \$1700 traffic development impact fee is too high per new residence. Again, the opposite is true. Traffic impact fees range from \$800 to \$40,000 per home throughout California; the \$1700 proposed fee is in the lower 5 percent. New commercial development would be taxed according to a formula related to the \$1700 for residential building. Of the \$1700, only 10 percent will go for I-5 expansion, while the remaining 90 percent will go for interchange construction and overpass improvements. SCRIP-FIX 5 fees will only take place when our county is growing at 1 percent per year and no sooner than two years out.

There are certain voices in Shasta County who are raising legal concerns about widening I-5. We

feel those concerns are red herrings. I-5 was structurally and environmentally designed to have three lanes in each direction. We should also be thinking about preserving corridors along I-5 for light rail or other mass transit options.

Who benefits from I-5? We all do. According to a 2007 survey, 83 percent of households use I-5 on a weekly basis. Half of the local driving population uses I-5 daily and 84 percent of voters agree that congestion will be a problem in the future if I-5 is not expanded. Meanwhile, 77 percent of voters support expanding I-5; 90 percent of the cars and trucks using I-5 during the morning and evening rush hour are local.

I know of no major business that does not benefit from I-5 to bring citizens safely and with less congestion into our towns. The goods that stock our shelves are delivered on I-5. It is well known that freeway driving saves lives, saves gas and saves time. The surest way to keep our local city roads less congested—thus reducing maintenance costs—is to have I-5 run smoothly.

It will be those counties and cities who have a regional plan in place that will get the federal and state grants. This was seen in April 2007, when a \$27 mil-

lion Cottonwood Truck Climbing Lanes Project for I-5 was granted by the California Transportation Commission.

This was directly awarded because of Shasta County's preliminary commitment to SCRIP-FIX 5 and a "Blue Print" for future transportation improvement.

The Highway 44 reconstruction over the Sacramento River is continuing to be funded by the State. The Cypress Bridge expansion to six lanes, as well as the North Street Bridge in Anderson actually is 80 to 100 percent funded by state and federal gas taxes.

We think it is hypocritical to tell the state and federal government give us your money for "our" roads but don't expect a dime from us for "your" roads. Our elected officials commissioned this independent SCRIP-FIX 5 Study which is predicting significant stop-and-go traffic on I-5 in 12 years. Now is the time to make sure that Interstate 5, its overpasses and interchanges are expanded and updated to meet the population growth for the future.

We urge our local county- and city-elected officials to look at the big picture and to carefully analyze the facts.

Ron Reece

Citizens for Smart Growth