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State actions slow down carpool lanes construction

By Noel Stack | Mother Lode News

EL DORADO HILLS - Construction, albeit subdued, continues on the Highway 50 carpool lanes up the Bass Lake Grade despite the state's decision to withhold cash.

Officials with Nehemiah Construction, a Benicia-based company, and the El Dorado County Department of Transportation negotiated a revised, lighter construction schedule for the project after the state decided to hold on to promised funds - \$20 million from the state Corridor Mobility Improvement Account - in the wake of the state budget crisis that could leave the state without cash to pay its bills by February.

"It's frustrating because Nehemiah's anxious to get started; we're anxious to get started," said John Kahling, supervising civil engineer with DOT. "The weather's good and we're not able to be as productive as we would like."

Construction began at the end of December.

Last week crews with subcontractor EP Jarrett drove in the 1,500-pound piles for the abutments needed to widen the bridge over Silva Valley Parkway and Nehemiah's workers continued breaking up rock and moving dirt at the project site. Crews regularly water down the site to limit dust; rocks will be tested for asbestos prior to their removal from the site, Kahling said.

About 30,000 cubic yards of rock and dirt will be removed from the project site, Kahling said. Because of the construction slowdown, Kahling said he doesn't yet know where the material will go. "When construction is in full swing there's a market for rock for retaining walls. A lot of it gets crushed and used for aggregate," he said.

Construction activities on hold are lane shifts and roadway grinding. Those require an investment DOT can't guarantee at this time because it doesn't have all the cash in hand, according to Kahling.

"If something happened and the bottom fell out ... it would all be thrown away," he said.

The temporary agreement with Nehemiah Construction expires on Feb. 28. If the state doesn't release the CMIA funds by then DOT staff will go to the El Dorado County Board of Supervisors for guidance. The supervisors could temporarily move funds from another road project's account until the county receives the state money.

"The county has a lot invested in this project," Kahling said. "It has to be done."

This phase of the carpool lanes picks up at the El Dorado Hills Boulevard-Latrobe Road intersection with Highway 50 and extends the lanes to just west of Bass Lake Road. A tentative completion date is fall 2010.

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