



May 7, 2009

Big connector road produces disconnect for some residents

By Noel Stack | Mother Lode News

When Ray Harikian bought his home in the Four Seasons development he didn't object to a lot that backed up to White Rock Road.

"I don't mind the traffic," Harikian said. "I think I would mind four to six lanes of traffic, especially the trucks."

For that reason Harikian, and many others, attended a community workshop last Wednesday to share their opinions about the Capital-Southeast Connector - a planned freeway bypass tying Elk Grove to El Dorado County designed to alleviate congestion on Interstate 5, Highway 99 and Highway 50.

Alternatives on the table list White Rock Road and its intersection with Latrobe Road in El Dorado Hills as the last eastern section of the connector. The project would require roadway widening to four or six lanes (at the county line White Rock Road is currently two lanes) and bring additional traffic to the already busy Latrobe Road intersection.

On average, more than 22,000 vehicles travel (eastbound and westbound combined) through that intersection each day, according to the most recent average daily traffic counts from the El Dorado County Department of Transportation.

During a presentation, as some in the audience cringed at the idea, Capital-Southeast Connector Joint Powers Authority Executive Director Tom Zlotkowski told the group of about 35 residents that White Rock Road is at this point only an option.

"Anything you see here is still up for discussion ... but we had to start somewhere," he said.

The Capital-Southeast Connector JPA, a collaboration between El Dorado County, Folsom, Sacramento County, Rancho Cordova and Elk Grove, took over connector planning from the Sacramento Area Council of Governments in late 2006. JPA members adopted SACOG's top four connector alternatives as a starting point.

Zlotkowski and other stakeholders are currently taking the project on the road, getting input and ideas from residents in the connector areas.

The El Dorado Hills Citizens Alliance has already pitched one other option to the JPA - leaving El Dorado County out. Citizens alliance members propose building a new road in the city of Folsom's sphere of influence tying White Rock Road on the Sacramento County side to Highway 50.

El Dorado Hills Area Planning Advisory Committee member John Hidahl supported the idea of a new road tying the connector to the freeway, saying, "The quicker you can get people to Highway 50 the better it is."

Four Seasons resident Modean Gibson also advocated for another route, saying she doesn't want to give up the rural nature of the area. Between Four Seasons and the Sacramento County line White Rock Road travels through rolling hills often used for livestock grazing.

Gibson's husband Don also pointed out that plans by three construction companies to use nearby property in El Dorado and Sacramento counties as rock quarries will likely add more unwanted traffic on White Rock Road.

"They're very large applications that are going to take a lot of rock out there," Don Gibson said.

Zlotkowski said the quarry applications are part of the environmental studies currently under way for the connector project. The JPA hopes to release a draft environmental impact report and draft environmental impact statement in spring 2010. If the schedule holds construction on the first phase of the connector (location to be determined) would likely begin in 2013, according to Zlotkowski.

Other ideas suggested at the workshop included creating toll roads, building other connections to Latrobe Road and separating the quarry truck traffic.

District 1 Supervisor John Knight, who represents part of El Dorado Hills and sits on the connector JPA, didn't specifically comment in favor of or against any idea, but said, "Any route into El Dorado Hills must show a benefit."

With a long list of suggestions to review, JPA staff will return to El Dorado Hills for two more community workshops in early June and July.

nstack@villagelife.com

The Mountain Democrat Newspaper is published Monday, Wednesday, Thursday & Friday by Mountain Democrat Inc.

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