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\$5 million from ARRA to fund bike and ped lanes

| By Chris Daley | Democrat staff writer

One day, in the not so distant future, you will be able to walk or ride your bike from anywhere on Placerville Drive to anywhere on Missouri Flat Road without having to negotiate the winding, narrow lanes of Forni Road or Green Valley Road - and without having to wade across Weber Creek.

Because of a \$5 million allocation of State Transportation Enhancement funds from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, before too long you will be able to use a new "bike-pedestrian facility" that will hang out from the east side of the eastbound lanes of the Highway 50 bridge that spans the Weber Creek canyon. A bike-pedestrian facility is a transportation industry term for what most of us would call a "lane" or a path.

This is an element of the larger Missouri Flat Interchange Project which is expected to get under way later this fall and be completed approximately two years later.

For those wishing to drive between the same points, CalTrans in concert with the El Dorado County Department of Transportation, will be adding an "auxiliary lane" to each of the two bridges.

"The auxiliary lane will allow drivers to go from Missouri Flat to Placerville Drive or the opposite direction without having to merge into through traffic," Dan Bolster, Senior Transportation Planner explained in a phone call Wednesday. Bolster is attached to the El Dorado County Transportation Commission which is the lead, local agency for the project.

In addition to the auxiliary lanes easing access to both commercial areas, the bike-pedestrian facility will debouch into new landings on each end, so bikers and walkers can access either area safely and seamlessly, Bolster noted. He added that because of thoughtful planning long ago, the eastbound bridge was built with an extra wide "footing column" that will support part of the facility.

District 3 Supervisor Jack Sweeney was quoted in a press release issued by the EDCTC earlier this month.

"The Missouri Flat project was the only construction-ready bicycle and pedestrian project in all of CalTrans District 3 (a large Northern California CalTrans administrative district). I am proud that we took the early steps necessary to design the bridge to accommodate a future bike path which provided us the opportunity to obtain these funds," Sweeney said.

Bob Smart, county Parks and Recreation commissioner, described some of the history of the upcoming project including a perspective that "walking and riding a bike, non-motorized travel, are important means of transportation too, and we had to find a way to serve those people as well."

Consequently, they were considered in the environmental documents for the Missouri Flat project back in Aug. 2004 and allowed the facility to meet the criteria for the special funding.

Smart added that many students attending Herbert Green Middle School at Forni and Missouri Flat roads actually live in the Placerville city limits, particularly in the Mallard Lane area off upper Green Valley Road. Currently they are not able to safely walk or bike to school, Smart noted, adding "that means in many cases their parents are having to drive them to and from school."

He also clarified that the county is in charge of building at the Missouri Flat side while at Placerville Drive, the city takes the lead through its Western Placerville Interchange Project.

ARRA funding includes an additional \$4.5 million for six road rehabilitation projects in the county and City of Placerville, and according to the rubric developed by CalTrans, "the total El Dorado County share of ARRA funding (\$9.5 million) will generate up to 171 jobs," stated the EDCTC press release.

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