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Op-Ed

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TOPIC: SANBAG seeks Federal funding for Devore Junction

SANBAG seeks Federal funding for Nationally-significant project



By Larry McCallon, President, San Bernardino Associated Governments

Funding \$1.7 billion in transportation projects throughout San Bernardino County during the next two years requires a complex mix of federal, state and local revenues. San Bernardino Associated Governments (SANBAG), the county’s transportation agency, is constantly seeking funding strategies to improve, expand, and rebuild our county’s transportation system, which includes many aging and inadequate freeways and bridges built in the 1950s.

Not only has our population boomed since then, putting more vehicles on our roadways, but our county’s freeway system is also highly impacted by heavy truck traffic moving goods through Nationally-significant trade corridors that connect the ports and Los Angeles Basin with the rest of the nation. There are only three major freeways out of this Basin, making these corridors critical to interstate commerce and international trade.

The busiest route used to transport goods out of Southern California takes trucks right through the heart of San Bernardino County via the I-15 and I-215 Freeways, through Cajon Pass, and on to the rest of the nation. Located at the base of Cajon Pass, the I-15/I-215 Devore Junction Goods Movement Improvement Project is SANBAG’s highest transportation improvement priority. These two freeways merge just as heavy freight traffic, recreational vehicles, and high desert commuters begin climbing through the mountainous Cajon Pass, and this Junction is considered one of the worst grade-related bottlenecks in the nation. Serious safety conditions exist

with the merging of the various types of vehicles. More than one million vehicles pass through this Junction every week, averaging 160,000 vehicles per day. By 2040, the California Department of Transportation predicts this Junction will be burdened with 379,000 vehicles per day.

Not only is this Junction a congestion chokepoint, but an inadequate interchange design and serious deterioration from years of heavy usage compound the problem further. The original design was never intended to handle this amount of traffic.

For all these reasons, the junction is being redesigned and will be reconstructed to add vehicle lanes and truck by-pass lanes. This will result in safer conditions with less weaving among different types of vehicles. The entire Junction will be returned to a “state of good repair,” and historic Route 66 will be reconnected under the Junction to provide another route for local traffic and emergency access.

Rebuilding the Devore Junction will cost \$324 million. To date, the State of California has committed 42.5% of the funding, SANBAG has committed 47.7% of the funding, and Federal grants have been obtained for less than 1% of the funding.

Because this project will provide significant benefit to the nation, SANBAG is asking Federal sources to contribute more toward completion of the funding package for these much-needed improvements in the form of a \$30 million Federal TIGER III Grant (Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery Grant) for the I-15/I-215 Devore Junction Goods Movement Improvement Project. Without this Federal commitment, the project could lose State funds if construction is not started by 2012. Putting the last piece of the funding puzzle in place will allow the construction to commence in 2012 utilizing an innovative method called “Design-Build.” Using this method, the contractor both designs and constructs the project as a way to get the project completed sooner. Earlier construction of this project also means bringing much-needed jobs sooner to a region plagued with 14% unemployment.

We urge residents, businesses, and truckers to call or write Congress and the US Department of Transportation, asking them to support SANBAG’s TIGER III Grant proposal. Completion of these improvements will provide a Junction that will be safer, uncongested for years to come, and as importantly, will put people back to work.

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Larry McCallon is the President of San Bernardino Associated Governments (SANBAG) and Mayor of the City of Highland.