Appendix K Issue Paper on Center Valley Interchange

STATE OF CALIFORNIA
DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION
District 1
P. O. Box 3700
Eureka, CA 95502-3700
(707) 445-6330

CALTRANS' RECOMMENDATION TO THE PDT ON WILLITS BYPASS PROJECT INTERCHANGES:

ISSUE: Should Caltrans recommend to the PDT that no interchange be planned in the central portion of the Valley for the Willits Bypass?

RECOMMENDATION: Yes.

RATIONALE:

1. Interchanges both north and south of Willits will provide adequate service to and from Willits. Major crossroads could be crossed by way of structure, thereby not disrupting current travel patterns. If a Route 20 extension and interchange was not considered for the Valley alternatives, Route 20 would be redefined to include existing Route 101 to a southerly interchange. While this might be considered less than desirable to those wanting a direct extension to the freeway, operation on the existing highway would still be vastly improved by removal of through traffic from Main Street. It is also important to note that even if an interchange is constructed in the center Valley, many highway users will continue to use Main Street, since it will be shorter and quicker for many trips from both the north and south. Based on our projections of travel times, the central interchange would be used less than the interchanges on either end.

2. By law, the purpose of the "interregional road system", which includes Route 101, is to serve interregional traffic. No mid-town connection is needed to serve this purpose.

3. Projects developed in the 1960s and 70s provided interchanges closely spaced to maximize service to local areas. Current guidelines strongly discourage frequent interchanges, and prohibit spacing closer than two miles in rural areas.

4. By considering an interchange in the center Valley, all alternatives would need to consider the potential for future growth inducing impacts to the Valley, which will not be an issue if no direct access is provided. Growth inducement, and its impacts to wetland areas is considered a major issue in this study.

5. It would cost between $7 and $9 million for construction of an interchange at the Route 20 extension or Commercial Street, including the necessary extensions. It would cost another $2 to $5 million for right of way acquisition. Therefore, the total cost would increase by $9 to $14 million.

6. Securing funding for the Willits Bypass will be a difficult matter. If the total project cost (right of way and construction) exceeds $60 million, the potential for programming probably decreases geometrically. As an example, it may be likely the project could be programmed at $60 million. If the cost were $80 million, the likelihood of programming may be far less.

7. When the time comes to construct the project, it is likely Caltrans will have to look at all options to reduce the initial cost of the project (e.g., shortening the project, eliminating interchanges). If the selected alternative included an interchange and route extension for Route 20 (or Commercial Street), it is likely that part of the project would have to be eliminated to make funding more feasible.

8. If, after environmental clearance, the Route 20 extension and interchange were deleted from the project, and later reprogrammed, it is likely the environmental impact statement would have to be rewritten. Unless envisioned within the seven year plan, right of way for the project could not be acquired.

9. By including alternative interchange locations in the Valley, many more alternatives and permutations of alternatives require study. This involves detailed engineering analysis, biological studies, right of way estimates, and housing relocation studies. <u>These additional alternatives and studies should not be undertaken, if likelihood of construction is dim.</u> Including many more alternatives could delay the project.

10. If, in the future, consideration of a Route 20 extension and interchange is desirable, a separate study and environmental impact statement could be undertaken.

11. For the westerly bypass alternative (since it crosses Route 20), the project should be considered with and without an interchange. Even though it crosses Route 20, initially it may be necessary, due to cost constraints, to construct the project without an interchange. If so, the highway would overpass or underpass Route 20, with no connection to Route 20 except at the Willits south interchange. It has already been concluded that the easterly bypass alternative would include no mid-point interchange.

JERRY HAYNES
Deputy District Director
Project Development

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E. F. POCH
District Director

Date: 7/10/91