

Traffic impact fee gears up

Fix 5 close to Phase 1 program

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RED BLUFF - The Fix 5 Partnership is getting closer to presenting its Phase 1 fee program.

The Interstate 5 Fee Program study was undertaken early this year by a joint task force of 10 Tehama and Shasta county agencies.

What it aims to do with the two-year study of the freeway is to come up with a way to play some catch-up and possibly even get ahead of problems that increasingly plague the freeway corridor through much of the two counties.

The two-phase program would set a "fixed" fee for a relatively brief time, while during the second phase it would be refined. Work on Phase 1 is nearing completion and soon will be presented to the public and the agencies involved.

As explained by Fix 5 officials at a series of meetings around the two counties in recent months is that federal and state funds for improvement are hard to come by, even harder if there is no local involvement, particularly with a local funding program.

At the various meetings Gary Antone and/or Dan Little have outlined the program and the goals of the partnership. Antone is director of the Tehama County Department of Public Works and the Transportation Commission and is serving as executive director of Fix 5. Little is chief executive officer of the Shasta County Regional Transportation Authority.

Fix 5 Partnership consists of the Tehama County Transportation Commission, the Shasta County Regional Transportation Agency, the California Department of Transportation, Shasta County, Tehama County and the cities of Corning, Red Bluff, Anderson, Redding and Shasta Lake.

While all the agencies have agreed to participate, votes by city councils in some cities were divided; in Red Bluff it was 3-2.

Caltrans has a \$585,000 grant from the State Planning and Research Program to fund a two-year study of I-5, with a completion date of June 30, 2009.

The primary focus of the partnership, as outlined at any number of meetings:

- Identifying improvements needed on I-5

- Create an interim fee dedicated to funding I-5 improvements

- Creating a financial plan identifying possible funding sources for improvements

- Creating a regional coordinated program to meet future travel demands

- Develop a financial plan that best leverages state and federal funds for I-5 facilities

Antone said when you are talking I-5 you are talking the I-5 "corridor," and that means nearly all of the valley floor in Tehama County, from Sierra foothills to Coast Range foothills, not just a mile this or that side of the highway.

What the study the task force is undertaking is meant to do is ensure that all future development, be it commercial or residential, is required to pay a "traffic impact fee" to offset what the additional vehicles will add to the cost of improving and maintaining Interstate 5.

Such fees have only in recent years been pushed by the California Department of Transportation.

This week, Fix 5 Partnership responded to a series of questions and concerns raised in a June 22 letter from the board of directors of the Red Bluff-Tehama County Chamber of Commerce.

Among the posers that were answered by Fix 5 over the signatures of Antone, Little and Tim Huckaby, deputy district director of

Caltrans District 2:

- Fees or taxing the potential local growth and new developments for interstate highway improvement appears to be a de facto "no growth" policy.

Fix 5 said that implies the traffic impact fee will be a disincentive to development. It does not believe it will, pointing out that the proposed phase 1 fee for \$247,000 home (the median price in Tehama County in 2005) would be in the range of \$1,000 to \$2,000, or less than 1 percent of the total purchase price.

- The Chamber pointed out that any project requiring an environmental impact report already has mitigation measures for the developer regarding impact on roadways, including interstates.

Fix 5 responded that an EIR "may or may not" identify mitigation for impacts on mainline highways, and that subsequent project approvals by the local city or county agency may not require implementation of mitigation measures. The fee Fix 5 wants applies to mainline facilities, "which avoids the need for such mitigation to be required by an EIR. It would also mean less cost to the developer.

The Chamber letter goes on to state that "local chambers of commerce dislike new taxes of any kind placed on a business. You can call it a fee, but if it walks like a duck, looks like a duck, and talks like a duck, it's a duck." Tax or fee, it's all the same to us.

The letter, over the signatures of Jay Harn, erstwhile chamber president, and Bill Moule, chairman of the local government services committee, goes on to say that the chamber is willing to work to develop reasonable impact fees ... with "a fee structure that protects existing taxpayers in Tehama County and will work equally diligently to create a new paradigm for making I-5 safer and less congested, rather than just fee/tax the real estate of the future people who may move to Tehama County.

Fix 5 responded by saying the statement "is encouraging. The Fix 5 Partnership is committed to working with all interested community groups and members of the public to develop an equitable traffic impact fee program."

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