

Group hopes plan helps traffic flow

By Tony Burchyns/ Times-Herald, Vallejo

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Heavy traffic travels along Interstate 80 near the Redwood exit in Vallejo. (Chris Riley/Times-Herald)

Regional transportation planners believe they've found a better way to predict traffic patterns through 2030.

The result could be less congested freeways, highways and regional roads connecting cities in Napa and Solano counties, planners say.

A proposal to create panels of local officials to oversee a computerized travel demand model is being circulated among the region's cities.

The Benicia City Council unanimously approved the proposed agreement last week.

Future development of the model is significant because it could be used to show the benefits of adding more public transportation options.

"It's not a giant computer, but it does giant things," Benicia civil engineer Mike Roberts said.

Additionally, regional traffic forecasting may be used to justify fees for regional roads if a proposed regional traffic-impact fee program is implemented, Solano Transportation Authority Senior Planner Robert Guerrero said.

The first version of the model was adopted by the Solano Transportation Authority board in 2005, and an update was OK'd last year.

Public works representatives from the county's seven cities and the county of Solano have met informally with regional transportation officials to supervise and maintain the software program. But attendance at these meetings varied, officials say.

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The proposed panels would consist of city staff members. But meetings would be open to the public and subject to the state open meetings law (Ralph M. Brown Act), according to the interagency agreement.

The computer program, called the Napa-Solano Travel Demand Model, allows for countywide planning for future traffic impacts, said Daryl Halls, executive director of the Solano Transportation Authority.

It's been used for traffic studies related to the Interstate 80-680 freeway interchange project, which is undergoing environmental review; the Cordelia eastbound truck scales relocation project, which is nearing design phase; and the State Route 12 Jameson Canyon widening project, which has entered the design phase.

Additionally, it provides data for development-related traffic studies for the entire region, and predicts how large land-use projects -- like big retail stores -- would alter traffic flow between cities, Halls said.

Establishing formal oversight would encourage more uniform planning for the

future, Halls said.

"We rely on land-use forecasts from the cities (to update the traffic-demand model)," Halls said. "We want to make sure the cities are comfortable that the right staff members are providing input."

All committee recommendations would be reviewed by senior planning officials in the various cities and at the county level. Final approval of changes to the traffic-panning model would be granted by the Solano Transportation Authority's board, which includes elected city government representatives.

Halls said he expects signed written agreements establishing the committees to be delivered by October.

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