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El Dorado tackles Hwy. 50 interchanges

Roadwork ahead for next decade

By Cathy Locke -- Bee Staff Writer

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Motorists can expect plenty of construction along Highway 50 and western El Dorado County interchanges in the coming decade, as transportation officials work to ease traffic flow along some of the most congested sections of the heavily traveled route.

"We're finding ourselves with a lot of work to do on these interchanges all along the Highway 50 corridor, and now is the time to do it," said the El Dorado County Department of Transportation's Steve Borroum.

County officials and residents also called for improvements to the road system that carries traffic to and from the freeway.

Borroum, acting deputy director for transportation planning and land development, presented the Board of Supervisors with an overview of major projects Nov. 8.

Nine interchanges exist between the El Dorado-Sacramento County line and Placerville, and improvements are planned for seven of them, according to a staff member report. A new interchange also will be built at Silva Valley Parkway, and Highway 50 carpool lanes will be extended from El Dorado Hills to Ponderosa Road in Shingle Springs.

Borroum said the county is tackling Highway 50 traffic issues on several fronts.

The transportation department, along with the El Dorado County Transportation Commission, the state Department of Transportation and the cities of Folsom and Rancho Cordova, are developing a strategic plan for the stretch of freeway between Ponderosa Road in El Dorado County and Mather Field Road in Sacramento County, he said. The goal is to determine the improvements needed to serve projected growth in El Dorado County.

Each agency uses a different traffic model, Borroum said, and those models differ from the one used by the Sacramento Area Council of Governments, the agency that disburses transportation funds for the Sacramento region.

"We're trying to bring the model and land-use assumptions to a common base," Borroum told the supervisors.

The board on Nov. 8 authorized the Transportation Department to negotiate contracts with engineering and environmental consulting firms for five projects: the El Dorado Hills Boulevard-Highway 50 interchange and carpool lane extension, as well as improvements to interchanges at Bass Lake, Cambridge, Ponderosa and El Dorado roads.

Carpool lanes end just west of El Dorado Hills Boulevard, and Borroum said bringing them to El Dorado Hills Boulevard is essential. The next phase would extend them east to the base of the Bass Lake Grade, he said.

The project would require widening the Highway 50 overcrossing of El Dorado Hills Boulevard.

As for the planned addition of an interchange at Silva Valley Parkway, Borroum said the county is

about three months into a 12-month design and environmental review process. He said construction is about three years away.

Interchange improvements in Cameron Park and Shingle Springs - at Cameron Park Drive and Bass Lake, Cambridge and Ponderosa roads - are needed to serve continuing growth in that area. Borroum said all are in preliminary planning stages.

In some cases, improvements to nearby streets and intersections will be required before work begins on the interchanges, he said.

According to the staff member report, the interchange projects likely will be undertaken in increments from 2010 to 2015.

Looking farther east, the department will hire consultants to do preliminary design and environmental work for improvements to the El Dorado Road interchange and connections with Missouri Flat Road. Work also is under way to improve the Missouri Flat Road interchange. The project will include widening the Weber Creek Bridge.

Supervisors and residents said interchange improvements are important, but they argued that the county also needs to develop routes parallel to Highway 50 to divert traffic from the freeway.

White Rock Road is one such route. Borroum said the county is working with Folsom and Rancho Cordova on improvements that could be done in two to three years.

White Rock Road also is being considered as part of a proposed connector linking Elk Grove, Rancho Cordova and El Dorado Hills. The project is the subject of a SACOG study that could take up to 10 years, Borroum said.

Art Marinaccio of Shingle Springs said, "It is critically important that we spend a little more mental effort on parallel capacity."

Folsom is looking at annexing 3,500 acres south of Highway 50, he said, and development there would generate additional traffic.

If for no other reason, he said, parallel routes will be needed when interchange projects are under construction.

County Auditor-Controller Joe Harn said Saratoga Way in El Dorado Hills should be extended to Folsom before work begins on the Highway 50 bridge over El Dorado Hills Boulevard. "I really think it's going to be a mess till we connect Saratoga to Iron Point," he said.

Supervisor Rusty Dupray told the board Tuesday that Folsom city officials have said that they are prepared to complete the connection to Iron Point Road as soon as Saratoga Way is extended to the county line.

Supervisor Jack Sweeney said the county needs to take a look at its priority list and funding sources to make sure they coincide.

Transportation Director Richard Shepard said he will present the board with a five-year capital improvement program by the first of the year.

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