

Thomas Roads Improvement Program

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State approves funding for Westside Parkway construction

The California Transportation Commission (CTC) allocated \$133.2 million to the City of Bakersfield at its meeting in Sacramento yesterday, August 28, 2008. The funds will be used to construct Segments 1 and 2 of the Westside Parkway, a new east-west freeway that will ultimately extend from Truxtun Avenue to Heath Road.

Funds for the Westside Parkway projects were authorized under the State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP). STIP funds are dependent upon the adoption of a State budget that does not borrow Prop. 42 money. (Passed in 2002, Proposition 42 redirected the State's portion of gasoline sales taxes from the General Fund to transportation programs.)

The first segment of the Westside Parkway project builds the Mohawk Street Extension, a 1.3-mile six-lane arterial with three bridge structures. The Mohawk Street Extension provides an additional river crossing between Rosedale Highway and Truxtun Avenue. Segment 2 begins construction of the east-west line and consists of a one-mile, eight-lane, divided freeway, with four bridge structures, extending from Mohawk Street to Coffee Road. The Westside Parkway Project will reduce congestion on existing east-west arterials and improve the connectivity of Bakersfield's existing transportation network.

Construction is expected to begin in early 2009 on Segment 1 and in mid-2009 on Segment 2. Initial work on the Westside Parkway began in the early 1990s and right-of-way has been preserved from development through the ensuing years. The project's Final Environmental Impact Report was approved in January 2007 and the City began design in March 2007. The Westside Parkway project is administered by the Thomas Roads Improvement Program (TRIP).

At the same meeting, the CTC approved funding for two railroad grade separations in the metropolitan area. The County of Kern received \$9.926 million for a grade separation at 7th Standard Road and the BNSF Railway, near Santa Fe Way. The project is part of the 7th Standard Road Widening Project. Design is complete and it is anticipated that the project will be advertised for construction in fall 2008. The project is expected to break ground in spring 2009.

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The County also received \$17.65 million for a grade separation at Hageman Road and the BNSF Railway, near Santa Fe Way. The County plans to start project design in the near future and anticipates construction starting in summer 2010.

Funds for the two grade separations were allocated from the Prop. 1B Highway-Railroad Crossing Safety Account. The suspension of Prop. 42 would not affect projects funded from this account.

The CTC also approved \$456,000 in STIP funds for a State-administered transportation enhancement project in the vicinity of Olive Drive, which includes the installation of climatically-appropriate trees.

Funding approval for these projects advances the coordinated efforts of the City of Bakersfield, County of Kern, Caltrans and Kern Council of Governments to improve the region's overall transportation system. These agencies collaborate in the Thomas Roads Improvement Program, which was created to manage the freeway-type projects designated for funding in the 2005 federal transportation act. The program was named in honor of former Congressman William M. Thomas, who successfully earmarked \$630 million in federal funds for Metropolitan Bakersfield.

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