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Manteca's \$410M decade

Highway 99 project big puzzle piece

No less than three dozen trucks passed on Highway 99 behind Caltrans Director Will Kempton Friday as he stood yards away from the Yosemite Avenue/Highway 99 interchange.

It was just a two-minute speech on the importance of a \$1 billion investment the California Transportation Commission approved a day earlier for Highway 99. The freeway is dubbed "California's Main Street of Commerce" due to the amount of farm products and other products flow to all points of the Golden State, the nation and the world.

Each passing truck simply emphasized his points.

"It (the overall \$1 billion commitment to Highway 99 in state bond act money) is recognition of the importance of this corridor to the economy and quality of life in California," Kempton said.

It wasn't by accident that the lawn of Perko's Cafe at the edge of the \$17 million Highway 99 interchange project was chosen.

Yosemite Avenue is the southern point for a \$496 million widening of Highway 99 from four to six lanes plus replacement of interchanges over 13.5 miles to the Cross-town Freeway in Stockton that will start in 2012.

The interchange itself is also representative of a "new approach" to partnering with local jurisdictions and the state to get transportation projects moving.

"The governor has set the tone for the department," Kempton said. "We aren't a transportation bureaucracy any more. We are a mobility company."

The interchange work doesn't have a cent of state funds. It uses federal, local and Measure K money. It is Measure K and local funds coupled with the state bond money that is making the Highway 99 project in San Joaquin possible.

The state is picking up \$282.4 million of the tab to widen and modernize the stretch of Highway 99 from Manteca to central Stockton that has an overall price tag of \$496 million.

The importance of the state and Measure K commitment to Manteca wasn't lost on Mayor Willie Weatherford.

"We (Manteca) have our ducks in the water," Weatherford noted. "We're not looking for ducks. We're about five to 10 years ahead of other cities in the area in (setting the stage) to secure jobs."

The Arch Road to Yosemite Avenue segment is costing \$252 million.

By the time that is combined with projects already done, committed or underway, Manteca will have secured \$410 million in public sector improvements by 2015.

That list includes a state-of-the-art surface water treatment plant, a wastewater treatment plant with the latest technology, the Big League Dreams sports complex, the Yosemite/Highway 99 interchange and a long list of smaller multi-million dollar projects ranging from downtown upgrades, road extensions and a new police headquarters to parks.

“It’s a big piece of the puzzle.” Weatherford said of the Highway 99 project.

Councilman John Harris who has played the lead role among elected Manteca officials in securing improved roads lauded California voters for the state transportation bond as well as San Joaquin voters for extending Measure K for 20 years. Both votes took place in November.

Harris noted that Measure K enjoyed the largest support of any transportation measure in the state in November.

“It looks like a lot of dirt is going to be thrown in the next few years,” said Harris who is also chairman of the San Joaquin Council of Governments that oversees Measure K projects.

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