

Lodi City Councilman Larry Hansen to lead Highway 12 improvement committee

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Lodi City Councilman Larry Hansen was chosen Thursday to lead a sort of planning commission to improve Highway 12.

He will chair a group of five elected officials called the State Route 12 Corridor Advisory Committee. Their charge is to oversee creating a plan so that the notorious two-lane road from Lodi to Napa has fewer fatal accidents. Perhaps someday it will be a four-lane freeway carrying even more cars and trucks.

But nothing about improving Highway 12 is easy, quick or cheap. In 51 miles from Lodi to Napa, the heavily traveled two-lane road crosses four counties, three CalTrans districts, three drawbridges and 13 miles of unstable peat soil that causes roadbed improvements to sink, crack and deteriorate constantly.

And if that weren't enough, engineers also have to consider that sea level is likely to rise and overwhelm the levees protecting Highway 12 from surrounding rivers.

Many short-term improvements have been planned and some are even under construction, particularly in Solano County. And next year, construction will begin on safety projects in San Joaquin County.

But Thursday's meeting did more than focus on just patching up Highway 12's problems. Solano Transportation Authority planning director Robert Macaulay unveiled how he and other officials will plan to make Highway 12 safer and able to carry more traffic.

That effort will cost \$1 million and take 17 months.

When finished, Macaulay expects they'll have answers about four options. He gave them names:

- "Business as Usual" option — Projects already planned will improve safety to some extent, but will they handle traffic increases in the future?
- "Big Dream" option — Building a brand-new corridor that would route cars, trucks and trains and avoid engineering problems with the present alignment. This would reduce soil problems and the challenge of sea level rising 2.5 to 5 feet in the decades ahead. Where will that new route be and what will it cost?
- "Four Lane" option — A freeway would probably mean replacing all three bridges and perhaps elevating the road on piers like the Yolo Causeway portion of Interstate Highway 80 between Sacramento and Davis. How much traffic would it carry and, again, what would it cost? Would it be a toll road?
- "Super Two Lane" option — Making the present road safer means building safety barriers, wide shoulders and left turn lanes at every side road. How much of the road will have to be ripped up; would traffic capacity increase significantly; and, again, what would it cost? When the plan is finished in April 2011, elected officials will decide how to "balance the limited funds and the almost unlimited demands," Macaulay, said.

During the meeting, other reports outlined safety improvements all along Highway 12.

Rio Vista Councilwoman Jan Vick praised CalTrans officials for "knocking down hills and improving sight distances" on a stretch of rolling terrain between Rio Vista and Fairfield.

Plans are being explored for the Rio Vista Bridge. It will have to be raised, turned into a tunnel or moved.

In San Joaquin County, \$28 million will be spent improving the interchange at Tower Park and building left turn lanes at crossroads from there east to Interstate 5. That work is expected to start in June 2011.

In November 2011, CalTrans will begin a \$47 million project on Bouldin Island from Tower Park to B&W Resort on the Mokelumne River. Crews will widen the shoulder, improve the underlying road structure and install rumble strips.

"This is a good example of government working We've gone from zero to money allocated," in the three years since a town hall meeting in Lodi, Hansen said.

Other members of the committee are Vick from Rio Vista, San Joaquin County Supervisor Ken Vogel and Solano County Supervisor Jim Spering. Sacramento County has been invited to send a member.

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