

# Funding in the lurch for half-done Pelandale overcrossing

## HIGHLIGHTS

Transportation leaders roll dice with offers to delay McHenry Avenue widening, Highway 132 bypass

Countywide transportation tax moving toward November ballot

Oakdale residents sound off on North County Corridor



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BY GARTH STAPLEY

[gstapley@modbee.com](mailto:gstapley@modbee.com)

Low gas prices may bring relief to motorists, but less tax money is bad news for road projects.

The problem is so bad throughout California that Modesto could face a halt on its overhaul of the Pelandale Avenue crossing over Highway 99, a \$55 million project expected to be finished around the end of this year.

In hopes of preventing that, Stanislaus-area transportation officials this week offered to put off widening McHenry Avenue from Ladd Road north of Modesto to the Stanislaus River, on top of delaying construction of a Highway 132 bypass near downtown Modesto.

The McHenry work was expected to begin in 2017 with \$4.1 million of local money, but won't start until at least 2019. Instead of breaking ground this year, the Highway 132 bypass won't begin until 2018 with \$28 million of local money. Both projects require lots more funds from state and federal agencies.

There is no guarantee that the postponements will keep Pelandale work on track.

**\$7.4  
million**

Cost of Stanislaus road projects that should voluntarily be deleted, according to state transportation officials

**\$0**

What Stanislaus leaders offered to delete this week

A stern letter from the California Transportation Commission, noting a statewide need to delete \$754 million worth of projects, put Stanislaus' deletion share at \$7.4 million, on top of unspecified delays. The Stanislaus Council of Governments, composed of representatives from county government and nine cities, offered the McHenry and Highway 132 delays, but decided to take a chance by offering no deletions.

“How can they possibly ask us to put off the Pelandale project when it’s half finished?” asked StanCOG Chairman Vito Chiesa, also a county supervisor. Rosa Park, the agency’s executive director, said that’s not likely to happen, but senior planner Jeanette Fabela said the state has the power to erase any of Stanislaus’ projects.

A lobbyist said drivers across California are consuming more fuel than ever, but low prices – earlier this week, no place had lower prices than Modesto – are bringing less tax revenue.

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**I READ IN THE MODESTO BEE THAT THIS (STANCOG POLICY) BOARD WILL TRY TO DECIDE SPENDING \$400,000 OF MY MONEY TO CONVINC ME THAT YOU NEED MORE MONEY. THAT GOT ME OUT OF MY SEAT.**

Don Calkins, Modesto

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In other action, StanCOG’s policy board unanimously agreed to spend \$200,000 of public money to help people understand a countywide transportation tax on the November ballot, and spend \$250,000 on associated environmental studies. The county and cities will contribute money according to a formula based on sales tax generated in each area, rather than on population or miles of roads in each area.

Voters will be asked to approve higher sales tax, with half the proceeds paying to fix neighborhood roads and 28 percent reserved for regional projects such as east-west expressways in the northern, central and southern parts of the county.

At a separate meeting, representatives from Modesto, Riverbank, Oakdale and the county learned that key environmental documents for the future North County Corridor are expected out on April 22, with an open house to collect people’s thoughts tentatively scheduled for May 19. Some concerned about losing property and quality of life got a head start Wednesday.

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**A LOT OF US HAVE A LOT INVESTED OUT THERE. IT’S HARD NOT TO TAKE LOSING MY HOME EXTREMELY PERSONAL.**

Curt Porter, Oakdale

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For example, Curt Porter said the expressway would jeopardize 38 families if its connection with Highway 108 east of Oakdale were located near Stearns Road, one of the options under review. He questioned whether California tiger salamanders – whose presence could cost taxpayers several millions of dollars in more studies, if any are located in pools from recent rain – are more important than people.

Kathe Poteet said a traffic circle envisioned near Atlas Road would increase pollution and noise for 650 nearby homes.

“Adding a roundabout at that point is only going to slow and congest things even more,” she said.

“Remember that Oakdale wants to retain its intrinsic value,” Lana Dyer said.

The May 19 meeting is tentatively scheduled from 4 to 8 p.m. in the Riverbank Community Center, 3600 Santa Fe St., Riverbank. Local officials will be asked to recommend a preferred route, while a final decision by state transportation leaders could be made in late summer.

*Garth Stapley: 209-578-2390*

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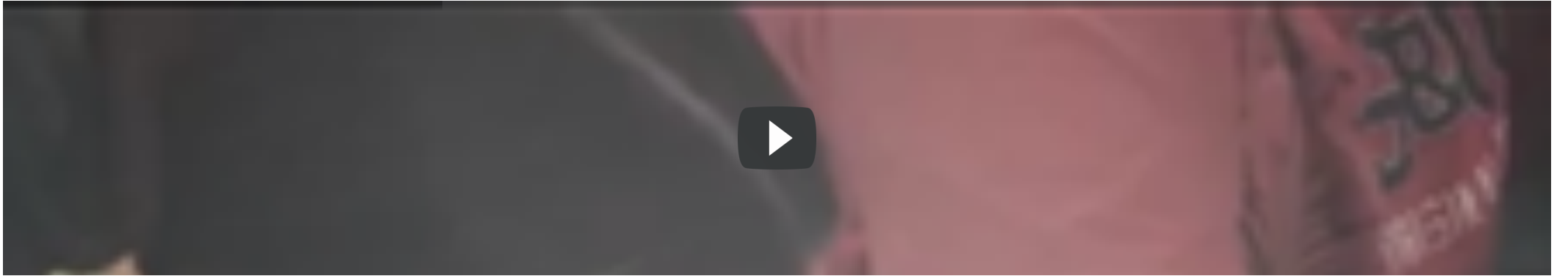
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