

California details funding plan for twin tunnels

By SCOTT
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FRESNO, Calif. — Customers of California's proposed twin-tunnel water project would have to make billions of dollars in fixed payments each year, even during dry periods when water levels run low, state officials said Friday.

The information was provided as the state treasurer's office released a financing plan for the \$25 billion Bay Delta Conservation Project and said it would only be feasible if water agencies adopted a set yearly payment plan.

The tunnels at the heart of the contested project are designed to send water around the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta to Central Valley farms and Southern California cities.

The proposed pair of 40-foot-wide tunnels would reach depths of 150 feet below ground and run for 30 miles bypassing the delta. Some 25 million Californians rely on the delta, say state officials, noting it plays a vital role in the state economy.

Water districts in Central and Southern California — such as the Metropolitan Water District, Westlands Water District and Kern Water District — have paid for much of the planning so far.

Those agencies and their customers — not California taxpayers — would be responsible for billions of dollars in debt over 50 years, even in dry years, the study says.

The study also notes risks. Such massive projects often run over budget and can be subject to unexpected regulatory and environmental changes.

Gov. Jerry Brown champions the plan, saying it will ease the delivery of mountain snowmelt to points south.

Environmentalists, delta farmers and the fishing industry want to block the project, saying the tunnels would further harm the delta and its water quality.

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