

Another View: Caltrans making progress, but funding lags

By Malcolm Dougherty Special to The Bee

Columnist Dan Walters writes that deferred maintenance and funding difficulties raise public anger, and he questions the state's ability to do its job. ("[Road tax diversions and reality](#)," Dan Walters, Jan. 25). We understand this frustration and want to set the record straight about the state's commitment to fixing California's transportation infrastructure.

This administration has balanced the state budget without additional borrowing of transportation funds. In fact, this year's budget repaid \$351 million in loans, freeing up funds to repair our roadways.

With the engagement of the California Transportation Commission, Caltrans will continue its efforts to improve efficiency, modernize processes and align resources to create a safe, sustainable and efficient transportation system. More needs to be done, but progress is being made.

Walters questions if Caltrans can deliver a new investment plan. When voters approved Proposition 1B in 2006, the California Transportation Commission effectively administered the program, and Caltrans and local agencies efficiently delivered projects.

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The California Transportation Commission has allocated \$11.3 billion in bond funds for transportation projects and invested cost savings into more projects. Another \$2.6 billion in projects were delivered through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. These investments, made during the recession, created thousands of jobs and increased mobility for people and goods.

Walters cites the legislative analyst's claim that Caltrans has 3,000 more employees than needed. Caltrans has reduced its project delivery staff by 25 percent since 2008 despite the increased workload delivering Proposition 1B projects. This is an area where we need to focus additional attention to ensure that taxpayers are getting a positive return on their investment.

It's critical that we maintain our existing highways, but Proposition 1B and other one-time funding programs are nearly exhausted. Gas taxes have not increased in more than 20 years, and fuel-efficient and alternative-energy vehicles have reduced revenue even further.

Californians expect roadways and bridges to be reliable, safe and in good condition. A sustainable revenue source is needed to meet that expectation.

Malcolm Dougherty is Caltrans' director.

