

Officials in Madera, Fresno counties look at shared traffic trends

By Marc Benjamin



Traffic merges onto Highway 41 in Fresno during the morning commute. Improving the highway between Fresno and Madera is the subject of a new study.

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- *Fresno, Madera counties will study traffic patterns to understand future growth.*
- *More than 20,000 homes will require new ideas for transportation.*
- *Counties hope funding can be found to finance new transportation projects.*

Traffic between Madera and Fresno counties will grow significantly in the coming years when thousands of new homes sprout up along the San Joaquin River.

But officials from both counties realize there is no way that existing routes between the two counties can stay the same without severe traffic problems.

The counties and their transportation commissions are in the process of resolving traffic issues to provide roads that tens of thousands of new motorists can travel on safely with few snarls.

A \$250,000 study is proposed to examine the origins and destinations of travelers using Highways 41 and 99 and their economic impacts to local communities. The plan initially was to examine Highway 41, but following meetings among both counties' supervisors it was determined that Highway 99 and alternative forms of transportation also should be

included, said Rob Terry, a principal planner for the Fresno Council of Governments, which staffs the county's transportation commission.

He said the 12-month study could be expanded while staying within the cost. The study could be approved during Friday's Council of Governments meeting.

The study will provide updates on traffic patterns to evaluate changes over the past several years, said Bernard Jimenez, Fresno County deputy director of planning.

"The study is intended to inform Fresno County, city of Fresno and Madera County about what's going on," Jimenez said. "I think the perception right now is that the majority of the jobs and goods and services are happening in the Fresno County region."

Madera County does have big plans, however — nearly 18,000 homes and hundreds of acres of commercial space.

Jimenez said if Madera County's development plans occur, it could change where people shop and work because Madera County wants to build "sustainable communities."

Fresno County also has about 6,800 homes planned and more than 100 acres of commercial space proposed in the Friant and Millerton Lake area.

Alternative transportation also is part of the study, and it will explore mass transit, biking and pedestrian possibilities, as well as light rail, Jimenez said.

Without a doubt, Highway 41 will require widening, said David Rogers, chairman of the Madera County Board of Supervisors.

"We don't want to do something that's going to hinder Fresno County or not be sufficient for traffic mitigation," he said.

Rogers also said that 30% of the traffic along Highway 41 is related to Yosemite National Park, and the counties and their transportation agencies may consider seeking federal funds to help pay for upgrades because motorists are traveling to a park that's under federal jurisdiction.

He said Fresno and Madera counties should get serious consideration for federal and state road monies because both are considered socioeconomically disadvantaged and both are considered "self-help" counties because citizens have approved sales-tax measures for road improvements. Both Jimenez and Rogers agree that there will be a need for other crossings over the San Joaquin River.

- Also at Tuesday's meeting, Fresno County supervisors will hear from residents about proposed water restrictions for five county service areas and waterworks districts.

The districts and service areas serve about 400 customers in Cantua Creek, El Porvenir, and the O'Neill Farming Community, which all get water through Westlands Water District. The Shaver Springs Waterworks District and Beran Way subdivision in southwest Fresno also is proposed for added restrictions. The board will delay action until March 24.

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