

# Funding cuts may place Fishhook merge lanes on hold

*Highway*  
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**REGION** — The addition of merge lanes on Highway 1 at the intersection with Highway 17, known as the Fishhook, may be delayed thanks to federal and state funding cuts.

A number of San Francisco Bay Area transportation agencies, including the Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority and Bay Area Rapid Transit, could feel the sting if funding is cut or delayed. That includes the \$11 million in state funds for Fishhook merge lanes.

Last August, the state Transportation Commission projected the amount of funding available for regional programming in the state through fiscal year 2006-2007 in the 2002 State Transportation Improvement Program.

In December, the Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission allocated \$18 million of the \$21 million promised to this region by the program. The bulk of the money was directed toward the first stage of the Highway 1 widening merge lanes project, while the rest was directed to cover cost increases on existing projects and road rehabilitation projects, officials said.

However, the state over-committed funds for the first few years of the program — 2003 through 2005. Basically, there are too many projects wanting funding in the next couple of years and not enough money available up front to fund them all.

The state Transportation Commission estimates only half of projected funds will be available now, according to Rachel Moriconi, county Regional Transportation Commission planner.

So the state Transportation Commission has asked regions statewide to re-evaluate their funding needs and determine which projects are priorities, as well as which ones could wait for funding until later, Moriconi said.

That includes the River Street widening project and the Highway 1 widening merge lanes project.

The state Transportation Commission will hold a policy workshop Feb. 21. Moriconi said the county Regional Transportation Commission will recommend funds from projects experiencing delays be shifted so the Highway 1 project can move ahead by fiscal year 2003-2004. That project's cost estimate is \$50 million.

Two local projects from which funding may be shifted include the Harkins Slough interchange and the Transit District's proposed Metrobase.

"So it looks like we are going to be able to balance it out," Moriconi said.

Though the state Transportation Commission cannot allocate part of the funds until 2006-2007, local jurisdictions can construct projects now if they can front the money themselves and wait until later for the state to reimburse them.

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