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Bond delay opens door for lobbying

Inside Bay Area

THE FAILURE of the Legislature and Gov. Schwarzenegger to agree on a major infrastructure-bond package buys some critical time for Livermore-San Joaquin Valley and Alameda County leaders.

The Valley and the county as a whole bear a disproportionate share of truck traffic thanks to the combination of the Port of Oakland and its container traffic and trucks carrying goods to retailers throughout the Bay Area.

The freeways that carry the burden are I-580 through the Livermore Valley to Highway 238 and then Interstate 880 to the Port of Oakland. The Oakland port is the fourth-busiest port in the country, although volume there is dwarfed by the Southern California ports in San Pedro and Long Beach that account for about 43 percent of the total container traffic into the United States.

Couple that port container traffic with the goods movement from trucks serving retailers and its a mess. About 60 percent of the truck traffic through the Livermore Valley is serving Bay Area retailers from distribution centers primarily in San Joaquin County.

Amazingly, in the governors initial proposal, I-580 was graded a low-priority improvement that was viewed as something to start in 10 years.

Given that I-580 in the afternoon is the Bay Areas second-worst commute, that speaks to the miserable job of lobbying done by our public officials and other interest groups.

The delay gives both county and Valley leaders a chance to come together and speak with a unified voice. Alameda County Supervisors Scott Haggerty and Nate Miley already have been pushing hard for improvements along the entire goods-movement corridor.

And Tri-Valley leaders, sparked by Assemblyman Guy Houston, R-Livermore, will come together on April 5 for a transportation summit. Livermore, Dublin and Pleasanton elected officials had been waiting for the results of the overdue triangle study that looked at what improvements to I-580, I-680 and Highway 84 would improve traffic the most.

That study isnt due until the end of the year, way too late for the state infrastructure package.

What needs to emerge from the April 5 meeting is Tri-Valley elected officials, business and chamber of commerce leaders all focused on the same priority list that then can be carried forward to the state.

Haggerty and Miley, as well as the local elected officials, need to take that same list forward and build a consensus within the county and extend that beyond the countys borders to San Joaquin County.

San Joaquin has many residents commuting on I-580 along with trucks from a growing logistics industry. San Joaquin is a natural partner with the Livermore Valley and Alameda County to help identify the I-580/238/880 corridor as a regionally, if not nationally, significant goods-movement corridor.

State leaders still are pushing for a major infrastructure bond in November, but likely will want to put that discussion to bed prior to the June primary. So, its critical that Valley leaders identify the priorities and push them aggressively so their constituents can get the relief they deserve.