

# Mountain Democrat

## Diamond Springs Parkway high on CIP list

**By Chris Daley**

From page A1 | May 06, 2013 | 3 Comments

Reducing traffic congestion while increasing economic development won out over arguments to keep the area's rural appeal in the ongoing Diamond Springs Parkway debate. El Dorado County Supervisors voted unanimously late last month to authorize the department of transportation to keep moving forward on the estimated \$25 million project.

Part of the DOT's recommended Capital Improvement Project for Fiscal Year 2013-2014, the DSP as it's also known, would connect Highway 49 just north of Diamond Springs to Missouri Flat Road near Walmart. DOT engineering staff urged the board to select its "Option 3," which represents a full build-out of the project. The board's decision gives the go-ahead for work to begin on the parkway and on improvements to Highway 49 between Diamond Springs and the proposed intersection with the parkway.

The four-lane road has been a key element of the larger, proposed Diamond-Dorado Retail Center project for years and has been part of the Master Circulation plan for the Diamond Springs area. Traffic from the south county through Diamond Springs to Highway 50 has reached near-gridlock during morning and afternoon commute hours, and the parkway is expected to relieve much of that pressure, according to DOT.

The county established a 20-year "Development Agreement" last December with Palos Verdes Properties President Leonard Grado for the retail center. That agreement was described at the time in a Mountain Democrat article which quoted El Dorado County Planning Director Roger Trout:

"It is a contract between the developer and the county," Trout wrote. "We use them to solidify a development approval where the development will take a long time and significant expenditure of resources to complete. Simply put, it allows the developer to risk sinking money and energy into the approved project with some confidence that the next Board of Supervisors or other action (will not) change or rescind it later."

Grado spoke at Tuesday's meeting and told the board that "without the parkway, there will be no development in that part of the county."

Chamber of Commerce Executive Director Laurel Brent-Bumb called the parkway and retail center "extremely important for the county's economic development."

"This is incredibly important for our county," District 2 Supervisor Ray Nutting said. "And it's especially important for the south county. I'm in favor of this."

Speaking of the CIP in general and the parkway project in particular, Sue Taylor from Camino questioned the viability of the funding for the projects. Taylor challenged some of the data and said, "I don't think the public really wants to pay for this road. Outreach for this project has been inadequate and the funding isn't clear."

District 5 Supervisor Norma Santiago asked for assurance and Matt Smeltzer, DOT deputy director, said, "the parkway is funded."

Area residents Kris Payne and Bernard Carlson spoke in favor of the parkway. Carlson said, "We need to bring retail and shopping up here ... Without it you die on the vine."

Payne called air quality and traffic congestion significant "quality of life" issues.

Preliminary work remains before construction can begin. The county has not yet acquired all of the rights of way needed for the parkway and Highway 49 projects.

Other items on the CIP list will come before the board again during budget hearings in June.

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