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## My View: A wider U.S. 50 would only worsen matters

**By Glenda Marsh - Special to The Bee**

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How do we improve travel time and convenience, and best spend public money along the Highway 50 corridor so it can serve everyone far into the future? By working together for the best projects.

Believe it or not, improving Highway 50's capacity is something neighborhood groups, transportation advocates and environmental groups in the Sacramento region want to achieve.

And right now, an important opportunity is knocking.

Recently, a Sacramento Superior Court judge ruled that the California Department of Transportation must redo its environmental analysis for its proposal to widen Highway 50, one possible, albeit temporary, solution to vehicle congestion. The ruling gives people who are concerned about transportation, quality of life, and climate and environment, a critical opportunity to push for top-notch transportation alternatives that will give us freedom of movement far into the future, without the negatives that come with widening the freeway.

In a recent TV news story about the ruling, the reporter sought to portray a bike commuter and an SUV driving commuter as having diametrically opposed transportation interests. As the bike commuter in that news story, I have some news. The driver and I share the same concerns – we want safe routes and roads, few delays, and a secure place to park when we arrive at work downtown. There's plenty of common ground here.

A better story would be how Sacramento's suburban and urban commuters could get their common transportation needs met by a convenient, multimodal (private auto, carpool, transit, bike, pedestrian) transportation system along the 50 corridor. We'll get to see what that looks like once Caltrans complies with the court order to describe and analyze a transit alternative to keep people moving along the 50 corridor no matter what.

How many of us in our region have wanted an alternative as gas prices have climbed, but cursed because we've failed to invest in multiple types of transportation over the years? Covering our bases is what we do in California already. Municipalities, water districts and state agencies are required to develop regional water plans that include investing money in different kinds of water-supply strategies to make sure water keeps flowing from our taps no matter what happens. Why not in transportation?

Neighbors Advocating Sustainable Transportation, or NAST, and the Environmental Council of

Sacramento, ECOS, seek sustainable, long-term freeway capacity to reduce vehicle congestion along Highway 50, without resorting to freeway widening.

Our goal is shared by many: Improve quality of life in our region's cities and neighborhoods. In this case, Caltrans is proposing to widen the freeway, portraying the project as a high-occupancy vehicle/carpool lane project.

Widening a freeway is a major construction project with significant environmental impacts. There are not only construction-related impacts, however. The most important impact comes from increasing the capacity of Highway 50 to carry more vehicles – 20 percent to 25 percent more, according to Caltrans' environmental impact report. More vehicles mean more air pollution and more greenhouse gas emissions, which contributes to climate change. In our region, people are very interested in addressing air pollution and climate change, including in the suburban communities.

Widening the freeway, even with HOV lanes, allows more vehicles to get on the freeway, and we'll be back where we started – intolerable congestion requiring ever-greater expense to relieve it. There are ways to increase the carrying capacity of any freeway, keep traffic moving and reduce commuters' frustration, and do it for the long term. NAST and ECOS advocate spending transportation dollars first on transit, pedestrian, and bicycle transportation capacity along our roadways, precisely so that we can continue to use our cars.

The court's decision requires Caltrans to analyze the obvious congestion-relief alternatives that it failed to analyze, such as other types of transit configurations that could achieve the same goal. This is important public accountability for spending scarce transportation dollars and deciding how to increase capacity for everyone along the 50 corridor.

Transportation is opportunity. In a fair and equitable society, transportation needs to be available to everyone so each can take advantage of something we cherish as a basic right – opportunity. We all know someone who cannot afford a car yet works full time and pays taxes. Or someone who is elderly and can no longer drive.

As vehicle owners and drivers, we must examine our attitudes about not supporting transit because we don't need it or don't like using it. We must all demand great transit. Let's work together to keep people and traffic moving, without the negative results – and lost opportunities – of widening freeways.

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