



Project helped by \$25 million from state commission

Summer start expected for SM bridge widening

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Construction could begin as soon as this summer on the long-awaited widening project on the Santa Maria River Bridge.

The infusion of \$25 million in Proposition 1B funding from the California Transportation Commission (CTC) Thursday is a major step forward in widening the span — by one lane in each direction — on Highway 101 connecting Santa Barbara and San Luis Obispo counties.

Widening the bridge — from four to six lanes along with bike and pedestrian paths — is meant to extend the widening of 101 through Santa Maria that was completed in 2009.

The bridge project is a joint venture between Caltrans and both counties. The majority of the bridge, which is under Caltrans jurisdiction, is in San Luis Obispo County.

“I’m sure a lot of people are happy to hear about the news today,” Caltrans spokesman Jim Shivers said.

Funding for the multi-agency project has been a high priority for San Luis Obispo-based Caltrans District 5, Shivers said .

Santa Maria Mayor Larry Lavagnino said he was thrilled by the announcement.

“I’m excited,” he said.

Construction costs are estimated at \$37.7 million and funding also includes \$10 million from Measure A through the Santa Barbara County Association of Governments (SBCAG) and \$ 2.7 million from the San Luis Obispo Council of Governments (SLOCOG).

It will be the first project funded by Measure A, the county’s transportation sales tax approved by voters in 2008, Lavagnino said.

The next step is the bidding process with prospective contractors, Shivers said. It usually takes about six months from CTC allocation to construction start, he said.

Local officials were hoping for CTC funding earlier, but other projects were allocated money, Shivers said.

Last year, the overdue state budget put the project on hold, as without a budget, the CTC could not sell the bonds necessary to fund the project.

Statewide, the CTC allocated \$1 billion to 107 transportation projects, including \$838 million from Prop. 1B, a transportation bond approved by voters in 2006. The remaining allocations are from assorted state and federal transportation accounts.