

# Fresno council approves study of Veterans Blvd.

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By Russell Clemings / The Fresno Bee

A key missing link in northwest Fresno's street network is a step closer to reality with the City Council's approval Thursday of a \$1.8 million environmental study of the proposed Veterans Boulevard interchange with Highway 99.

Part of a new artery connecting Herndon Avenue near Polk Avenue with Grantland Avenue south of Shaw Avenue, the interchange is expected to cost about \$108 million in current dollars and to begin construction in five years. It also will include new crossings over the Union Pacific tracks and Golden State Boulevard.

The Veterans Boulevard project was among those promised to voters in the 20-year extension of Measure C, Fresno County's half-cent transportation sales tax approved in November 2006. Additional funds are expected to come from fees charged to developers and, possibly, the federal government.

City Engineer Scott Mozier told the council that the environmental study was "the next step forward" in the process of getting the interchange project scheduled and built.

But Aquarius Aquarium executive director Tom Lang voiced concern about plans, described in a report on the interchange project, to close an offramp from southbound Highway 99 to Herndon Avenue. Lang's organization hopes to open a public aquarium on the San Joaquin River west of the highway.



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Veterans Boulevard, which was intended to cross over Highway 99 and connect with Bullard Avenue, ends abruptly at a fig orchard near The Island Water Park in Fresno.

In addition, attorney Richard Harriman warned the council that the Veterans project was likely to require more extensive environmental study than envisioned in the contract that was awarded Thursday. Without it, he said, "you're going to get delayed."

In other action, the council:

**Awarded a \$2.2 million contract** to rebuild a Fresno Yosemite International Airport taxiway using federal stimulus money. A \$9 million contract for another taxiway was awarded two weeks earlier.

**Heard testimony on amending the city's principal land use plan** to include background, goals and policies relating to air pollution and climate change. Final action, scheduled for next week, would enable the city to meet a deadline established by state law.

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