

Fresno eyeing Measure C funds to scrap bridge

Posted at 11:23 PM on Tuesday, May. 04, 2010

By Russell Clemings / The Fresno Bee

Street bridge in downtown Fresno was approved by voters almost four years ago when they renewed Measure C, Fresno County's half-cent transportation sales tax.

Now, city officials just want to tear the 62-year-old bridge down. And they want to use Measure C funds to do so.

On Thursday, the City Council is scheduled to vote on a staff recommendation to spend \$1 million demolishing the 2,000-foot viaduct, which links Golden State Boulevard with Broadway and has been closed since 2004.

The reason? Detailed inspections since the November 2006 Measure C vote showed that the bridge's concrete was deteriorating from within, making long-term repairs impossible at any cost. And building a new bridge would cost \$13.1 million to \$21.2 million.

"It was not worth rehabilitating," city Public Works Director Patrick Wiemiller said. "Demolition was the best choice."



MARK CROSSE / THE FRESNO BEE

The city wants to pull the plug on the Monterey Street bridge downtown. Almost \$2 million was set aside in Measure C to reopen it. This is the overpass from Broadway to H Street.

The council also will be asked whether to seek approval from the Fresno County Transportation Authority to use Measure C money for the bridge removal.

It's an unusual request -- a primary purpose of Measure C is to expand and improve streets and highways, not do away with them. But Ron Peterson, the authority's executive director, indicated he would likely recommend it for approval by the authority's board.

"If the city came forward and said we don't want to pursue this project, I think we would defer to them," Peterson said.

Any leftover money could then be diverted to more than a dozen other Measure C projects that are waiting for funding, he added.

The Monterey Street bridge was built in 1948 when Golden State Boulevard was the main route through the central San Joaquin Valley. It starts just north of California Avenue, in the shadow of the newer Highway 41 viaduct, then crosses G Street, the Union Pacific Railroad tracks and H Street before ending at Broadway.

Once it was a primary access route to downtown Fresno. But after construction of the two new freeways -- highways 41 and 99 -- its use diminished and it was relegated to a shortcut for local drivers with long memories.

In November 2004, an inspection by Caltrans showed that concrete had flaked off from some of the bridge's columns and beams, exposing steel reinforcing bars. The bridge was closed one day later. Homeless encampments soon sprouted on, under and near it.

A subsequent engineering study blamed the flaking on a chemical reaction between cement and sand and gravel in the concrete. The council then approved plans to repair the bridge, using a combination of Measure C funds and federal bridge program money to pay for the work.

A more detailed study followed. It included 16 core samples of the bridge's concrete, which showed that the deterioration had spread to the point that repairs would only extend the bridge's life by five to 10 years.

Wiemiller's report to the council said it is now considered unlikely that the city could ever get federal or state funding for the bridge's repair or replacement because of its cost and the availability of other routes in the area.

The reporter can be reached at rclemings@fresnobee.com or (559) 441-6371