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Interchange improvements win approval

Congestion is concern where Cameron Park meets Highway 50.

By Cathy Locke - Bee Staff Writer

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The El Dorado County Board of Supervisors took several steps last week to address traffic issues that Cameron Park and Shingle Springs leaders say are necessary to jump-start economic development in their communities.

Since Sam's Town, a popular family entertainment center and landmark off Highway 50, was torn down five years ago, "Cameron Park has become the 'land in between,' " said Judy Mathat, a real estate agent and member of the Shingle Springs-Cameron Park Chamber of Commerce. To many people, she said, it's just the area between El Dorado Hills' upscale Serrano development and the county's historic communities farther east.

The area south of Highway 50 is ripe for development, Mathat said, but road improvements are needed for that to occur.

The board during its Sept. 17 meeting authorized a \$4.1 million contract with the consulting firm DMJM Harris Inc. for engineering design and construction support services for improvements to the Highway 50-Cameron Park Drive interchange. The supervisors also authorized the Department of Transportation to solicit construction bids for improvements to the intersection of Cameron Park, Palmer and Country Club drives, north of the Highway 50 interchange.

In addition, the board approved an agreement with Pacific Mutual Consultants to prepare an environmental impact report for a proposed 76 gas station and Circle K mini-mart proposed south of the freeway near Durock Road and Mother Lode Drive in the Shingle Springs area. County planner Roger Trout said the project was approved by the Planning Commission based on a less extensive environmental study. But area residents concerned about the effect on area traffic appealed to the Board of Supervisors, which called for the more comprehensive study.

Trout said the environmental impact report will analyze how turning movements in and out of the site would affect traffic.

Transportation Director Richard Shepard said the improvements to the Highway 50-Cameron Park Drive interchange and nearby intersection are needed to alleviate traffic congestion. He said transportation planners will consider various alternatives to improve the interchange without having to replace the bridge.

"We'll see if we have any quick-hit fixes," he said.

Attention will be given to how Cameron Park Drive interchange modifications would affect traffic to the east at the Ponderosa Road-Highway 50 interchange, so that solutions at one site don't cause problems at the other, Shepard said.

The supervisors agreed that road improvement plans need to be in place before major development can proceed.

Supervisor Jack Sweeney said, "There are people that want to do some things in the Cameron Park area, and we need to provide them with some answers."

Sweeney said he didn't want someone to construct a building and have to tear it down 10 years later to make way for a road.

Shingle Springs resident Art Marinaccio urged the board and transportation officials to consider connecting Wild Chaparral and Palmer drives to provide a route paralleling Highway 50 on the north between Ponderosa Road and Cameron Park Drive.

Shepard said the interchange project would be pursued in phases, as funding permits.

The professional services agreement with DMJM Harris represents a new method of contracting for the county, he said, explaining that it places the firm on retainer to do the necessary work. The contract will be executed through a series of task orders, meaning that each step will come before the board for approval, Shepard said.

"We can go in small increments and evaluate the quality of service," he said, and the contract may be terminated at any time.

Mathat of the Chamber of Commerce said community leaders see the potential to create a town center south of Highway 50 that would provide a stronger sense of identity.

"We have an area where you can help the community become itself -- something other than just the land in between," she told the board.

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