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A Toll Worth Paying

By DENISE MORENO DUCHENY
Voice Guest Columnist
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One of San Diego's most significant transportation projects in more than a decade is the State Route 125. The project completes a vital missing link in San Diego's freeway network, connecting communities throughout eastern Chula Vista to Otay Mesa and the international border, as well as communities north and east like La Mesa, El Cajon and Santee.

It has been on the state's freeway plan since 1959, but years of insufficient funding delayed the project. The solution was found in an innovative public-private partnership, which has allowed the community to see this important project become a reality sooner than ever imagined.

As many are aware, south San Diego is experiencing a significant population increase. By 2030, southern San Diego County will increase its population base by more than 141,000 people, a 40 percent increase over the current 351,400 residents. The SR 125 is a crucial transportation asset that will help meet the demands of this projected growth. Without it, the region will see even more traffic gridlock.

Understanding the regional importance of this project, I agreed to carry SB 463, a ten-year franchise extension for California Transportation Ventures, the private company building and operating the toll road. The proposed franchise extension would address issues that arose after the initial franchise agreement.

The San Diego Association of Governments, the California Department of Transportation and CTV all agree that the franchise extension is a reasonable way for CTV to achieve compensation for the cost overruns, on the public side of the project, which were beyond its control.

The extension will provide CTV the ability to offer reasonable toll rates for residents and motorists while also allowing them to recoup increased costs associated with litigation delays, significant insurance increases, environmental monitoring costs and recreation facility improvements required by the county, all of which are beyond CTV's control. The alternative is for SANDAG and Caltrans to reimburse CTV for the cost increases. Both agencies have indicated that there are no public funds available and without this bill the project would be in jeopardy.

In addition, the lack of statewide funding and maintenance to existing roads makes the SR 125 extension an excellent option. The SR 125 will not be a tax burden. Throughout CTV's ownership, maintenance and California Highway Patrol costs will be paid by CTV, allowing local taxes collected to be paid back to the local community.

CTV, throughout this process, has worked closely with Caltrans, the city of Chula Vista and SANDAG, including working on the potential for adding capacity on Interstate 805. SR 125 South is a much-needed project for the region and is a good example of how effective public-private partnerships can be in addressing critical transportation needs. SB 463 is a reasonable and necessary solution to the current issues facing the project. The south San Diego community has waited more than 40 years for the construction of this crucial transportation asset. Let's get this done -- and get traffic moving.

State Sen. Denise Moreno Ducheny, a Democrat, represents the 40th State Senate District, which includes the South Bay and stretches along the border into Imperial County.