

 **Press Enterprise Article**

Do not reject partial parkway

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Editor's note: This op-ed responds to the editorial "Parkway myopia" (Our Views, June 16).

Riverside County has long been a national leader in integrating land use, habitat preservation and transportation planning. We take great pride in the success of our efforts to plan for the future; however, there comes a time to also focus on what is practical and feasible in the short term.

While our transportation needs are many, our resources are limited. The tough economy only heightens our challenges as we deliver important improvements such as those to Highway 91 and Interstates 215 and 15, and the expansion of Metrolink services. We must ensure that every taxpayer dollar spent on transportation has the most immediate and greatest impact.

In the case of the planned Mid-County Parkway, we cannot allow plans for the desperately needed 16-mile stretch of the corridor linking San Jacinto to Perris to languish for years, mired in environmental challenges and time-consuming lawsuits that hover over the western half of the proposed project between Perris and Corona. While there are no guarantees, it's clearly wiser to pursue half of the parkway -- a project which we have a greater certainty of building quickly -- than to keep tens of thousands of residents gridlocked while we spend many years pursuing a lengthier corridor.

Securing the eastern stretch of the parkway between Highway 79 in San Jacinto to I-215 in Perris allows this vital transportation corridor to advance where it is needed most, making the best use of our limited transportation dollars by providing the most immediate traffic and safety benefits. With this corridor moving forward, we will continue to search for solutions to the complex issues confronting the project west of I-215.

Make no mistake: Modifying the project limits for the parkway to the section between San Jacinto and Perris does not eliminate the need for a future corridor linking Perris to Corona. We must remain committed to developing a future east-west corridor somewhere between I-15 and I-215 in our long range plans.

Looking eastward, the traffic demand on the parkway is expected to be highest between Highway 79 and I-215. Initial projections show the route will attract 60,000 drivers each day. These are local commuters and motorists who are pleading for congestion relief. Reducing the scope of the parkway will cut the project's \$3.1 billion price tag nearly in half, which will help expedite the corridor's development by several years and provide traffic relief for our residents as

quickly as possible. Reducing costs on this project helps ensure that other vital projects can be built.

Officials at the city of Riverside have expressed concerns about cut-through traffic in their city should the parkway end at I-215. Detailed traffic circulation studies and analysis for a refocused parkway will thoroughly examine such issues to identify any needed mitigation. The Riverside County Transportation Commission will work closely with the city of Riverside and the Riverside County Transportation Department to minimize impacts.

Those studies will take into account the county's plans to widen Cajalco Road. This separate project is expected to provide needed traffic capacity between the I-15 and I-215 for at least the next 20 years for \$200 million and can be built much sooner than the western half of the original parkway.

Pursuing the entire 32-mile parkway from San Jacinto to Corona subjects the project to legal and environmental challenges primarily targeting the corridor's western section. Those challenges will delay the new parkway for years and threaten to derail the entire project, leaving our residents with no traffic relief.

Focusing the Mid-County Parkway project on the eastern segment will allow us to make progress in building the infrastructure our communities need now.

By acting prudently and proactively, we can accommodate our residents by making the best use of two very limited resources -- time and money -- to meet the transportation needs of future generations.