Council OKs state plan to finish I-15; Project includes two sections of covered freeway

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A conceptual plan for completing Interstate 15 along 40th Street through Mid-City, was approved by the San Diego City Council yesterday.

Under the plan, the city will pay about $18 million to build a block-long "cover" over a portion of the freeway, widen four bridges, and make other alterations to make way for the eight-lane roadway.

The long-planned project would add a new 2.2-mile stretch of I-15 between Landis Street and Adams Avenue, linking Interstate 8 on the north to Interstate 805 on the south. The state Department of Transportation (CalTrans) plans to spend about $122 million on the project, with construction starting in 1991.

The council voted 6-1, with Councilman Bob Filner dissenting, to instruct the city manager to negotiate a final agreement with CalTrans covering the construction and financing of the plan.

A final agreement is expected to be considered by the council within 30 days.

Under the proposed financing plan, the city’s $18 million cost would be paid by establishing a redevelopment project in the area which would produce more than enough tax revenue over 15 years to pay the construction cost and other redevelopment projects.

In a separate vote, the council agreed to have city staff study establishing the city's largest redevelopment area in Mid-City. Since the redevelopment area can not be established for at least a year, the city plans to finance a portion of the project by temporarily delaying two other minor improvement projects.

Under the plan, the city will pay for construction of a block-long road cover between Wightman and Landis streets. The cover is basically a concrete bridge that will be built over the new, below-grade section of the freeway.

CalTrans also will build a block-long freeway cover between Polk and Orange avenues.

Both covers would be equipped with pollution monitors that would sound alarms if pollution reached unsafe levels.

Barry Schultz, president of the City Heights Community Development Corp., opposed the agreement, arguing that the financing plan makes the community pay for a road
project that it does not want.

Schultz also said area residents originally had been promised that eight blocks of the road would be covered with usable property, and argued that space on the road cover should be used to spur commercial revitalization, rather than be developed as a park.

'We have other needs more pressing than the need for parks,' Schultz said. The road cover should be used for a shopping center, police substation or cultural center, Schultz argued.

Filner opposed the preliminary agreement, arguing that it leaves little room for compromise and improperly threatens the financing of other development projects in the area.

Mayor Maureen O'Connor supported the plan, saying the road cover plan is worthwhile and will provide needed extra park space in the area.

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