

Merced County, CA: Atwater-Merced Expressway – Key to Economic Development and 7,400 NEW Jobs

Request: \$1.6 Million for Environmental Work (NEPA) - Segment 1

Goal:

Provide additional capacity on SR 99 for interregional traffic and goods movement, accommodate existing and planned development within the Cities of Atwater and Merced, Castle Airport Development Center, and to University of California – Merced Campus.

Description:

Atwater-Merced Expressway (AME) will provide a new 7-mile expressway facility located in unincorporated Merced County, between the Cities of Merced and Atwater. The Merced Vision 2015 General Plan projects that future population in the Merced growth area will increase to 240,000 (30%) by the year 2035. Most of this growth is expected to occur east of the Atwater-Merced Expressway site.

The new expressway will provide improved connectivity, attracting commerce and industry to invest in the adjacent area that includes Castle Development Center. State of California Bond funding has been sought for the first phase of the project (1A) will include widening SR 99 to six-lanes, replacing the Buhach Interchange, and the Buhach Overhead at SR 99.

To become eligible for federal funds for the remainder of the project, \$1.6 million is being sought to prepare the NEPA documentation for the balance of the project.

Necessity:

- Reduce deficiencies on State Route 99 by replacing Buhach Road Interchange
- Widen SR 99 to conform to Caltrans SR 99 Business Plan
- Create an alternate route for State Route 59, which is experiencing significant levels of congestion, and State Route 140 to accommodate regional demand
- Provide additional capacity to serve U.C. Merced, Castle Commerce Center, and goods movement
- Prepare NEPA documentation for AME.

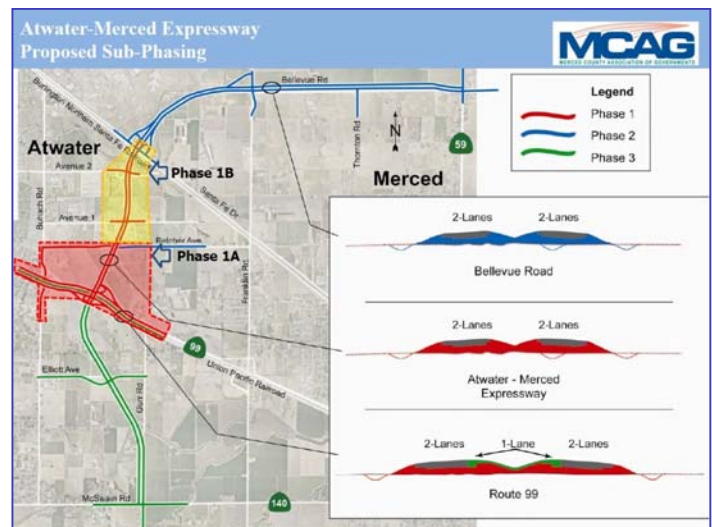
Beneficiaries:

- SR 99 interstate/inter-regional travelers and goods movement
- Merced County residents and commerce who travel between jurisdictions and unincorporated areas on a daily basis
- Employees working at the Castle Development Center, including Castle Airport, AT&T Call Center, and the adjacent United States Penitentiary
- U.C. Merced students and faculty

Contact:

Merced County Association of Governments
369 West 18th Street, Merced, CA 95340
Phone 209-723-3153 Fax 209-723-0322

Jesse Brown, Executive Director
209-723-3153, ext. 302
jesse.brown@mcagov.org



Merced County, California

The Great Central Valley of California lies between the Sierra Nevada and the Diablo mountain ranges, and is composed of two large valleys: the Sacramento Valley to the north and the San Joaquin Valley to the south. Merced County lies in the middle of the San Joaquin Valley and, while a struggling rural county, is rich in its diversity of cultures, environmental attractions, and quality of life. Other facts about Merced County:

- World's most productive agricultural area, with \$2 billion in products and \$6 billion in economic impacts
- University of California Merced – 10th UC campus opened fall, 2005
- 40,000 acres of wetlands, one of the most concentrated waterfowl habitats in Western U.S.
- Population of 251,000 on 2,000 square miles
- Diverse population of many cultures and ethnic groups, including 14% Hmong, 48% Hispanic, 25% Caucasian, 6% African-American, 7% Asian
- Castle Airport (former Castle Air Force Base) is a prime development target, as it contains one of the longest runways in California



Merced County has built momentum on many fronts, but still faces ongoing issues. Among them are:

- Fastest-growing area in California
- 11-22% unemployment rate, 2nd highest in state
- Income level well below state median
- **Receives 33-42% less than the per capita average from State and Federal sources**
- Extreme non-attainment area for clean air; 1/4th of pollution blown in from San Francisco Bay Area
- Highways not keeping up with traffic growth
- Streets and roads falling victim to deterioration and decay, due to lack of funding
- Many at-grade railroad crossing hamper mobility and emergency vehicle service