

This Week in Washington

Congressman Richard Pombo
11th District, California

Gridlock

My schedule this Congressional holiday recess was hectic. From meeting with folks all around my district and driving to my children's events at school, I've logged many hours in traffic on our area highways. It's frustrating.

Unfortunately, the amount of people stuck on the highways and the levels of frustration will only increase if we don't put aside partisan politics and commit resources to attacking congestion.

A few weeks ago, I joined MOVE IT (Motivated Officials Vying to Expedite Improvements in Transportation) – a transportation task force comprised of my fellow Bay-area legislators, led by Federal Glover, a first-term supervisor of Pittsburg. Unlike some initiatives in the past, our group includes federal, state and local officials committed to transportation alternatives. Getting a dialogue started with a focus on relieving traffic pressures in Eastern Contra Costa County is the goal.

During the first session of the 108th Congress, I introduced H.R. 619. If enacted, it would provide funding to conduct a study that would determine the feasibility of constructing an alternate highway and fixed guideway system over the Altamont Pass. Specifically, it looks at starting from a point south of Tracy, near the intersection of Interstate 5 and Interstate 580, and extending to Interstate 680 or 101 in San Jose. This effort is part of my commitment to create a seamless transportation system that is efficient, environmentally friendly, reliable and safe. Both locally and nationally, I am working to redefine and prioritize our transportation system needs to meet those of our growing communities.

The second Congressional session convenes this week. I believe early this year Congress will continue negotiations on the six-year federal highway reauthorization bill - The Safe and Flexible Transportation Efficiency Act of 2003 (SAFTEA). Both the U.S. House of Representatives and Senate are working on this bill, and all proposals preserve and improve the fundamental structure of the transportation equity act for the 21st century.

The traffic jams we face daily have become nightmares. They represent valuable time stolen from watching our kids' soccer games, having dinner with our families or any number of other activities that are more important than waiting in traffic.

Anything we, as legislators, can do to alleviate traffic congestion will build the quality of life for residents and commuters just passing through the area. This effort deserves more than just a representative looking out for the people in his or her jurisdiction. Just as traffic moves from one district to another – this is everyone's problem, and we should all be committed to the solution.

For more information, please write to my office at 2411 Rayburn House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515 or visit my website www.pombo.house.gov.