

EX 22

San Joaquin Hills tollway forges ahead

► Officials ready to issue bonds that will finance project. Meanwhile, Sansone continues his fight.

By Tony Cox
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COSTA MESA — In spite of community opposition, including a campaign by a Newport Beach councilman to fight a planned toll on a section of Newport Coast Drive, the San Joaquin Hills tollway is now a week or two away from commencing \$1.1 billion in bond issues that will finance the project.

Councilman Phil Sansone, in his latest appeal for public opposition to the toll on the 1.6-mile northern section of Newport Coast Drive, earlier this week sent a letter to Newport Beach and Costa Mesa residents asking them to send letters to the City Council and the Orange County Board of Supervisors. He also urged people to voice their opposition to the tollway at a City Council study session scheduled for March 8.

"Rest assured that I will continue to pursue elimination of the toll," Sansone said in the letter. "The council, however, will need strong community support in this effort since we are up against strong opposition by the non-elected

county bureaucracy."

Sansone attached to the letter a memo he sent to Mayor Clarence Turner — who still supports the tollway — detailing what he considers failures by the tollway agencies to make their plans clear to city officials. He said he will renew his support for the tollway only if no tolls are required to get from Newport Coast Drive to MacArthur Boulevard at least as far north as the planned New Ford Road.

"I am extremely disappointed and dismayed at the lack of communication between TCA (Transportation Corridor Agencies) and the council on this matter," Sansone said in the memo. "It is my opinion that TCA placed a higher priority on their own interests than they did on those of the people they are paid to serve."

"Regardless of what the so-called experts say, toll access from Newport Coast Drive to MacArthur is going to negatively impact Corona del Mar."

Sansone and Corona del Mar merchants have complained that the toll as planned on Newport Coast Drive will divert commuter traffic back down to Pacific Coast Highway and to San Joaquin Hills Road.

The councilman said in his memo that he was told not to "muddy the water" with complaints, as tollway officials are negotiating with

bond representatives, and changing the project could jeopardize the financing. He added that a tollway official told him that the planned 50-cent toll for the northern section of Newport Coast Drive is essential for the project to meet its financial plan and obtain bond financing.

Said TCA finance executive Wally Krcutzen: "If (moving the planned toll on Newport Coast Drive north of New Ford Road) would have a fiscal impact, there's no doubt about it. How much of an impact, I don't know."

TCA spokesman Mike Stockstill said tollway officials have not considered moving the toll on Newport Coast Drive. Asked whether community opposition, at this late stage of the financing process, could jeopardize the bond issues, Stockstill declined to speculate. Krcutzen said, "I'll never say never."

However, TCA officials are optimistic about successfully selling the bonds, most of which have received an investment-grade credit rating. Krcutzen said that once those bonds are sold, he believes the four-year project, which consists of a 15-mile, six-lane road extending from San Juan Capistrano to the Corona del Mar Freeway, will be able to overcome all obstacles.

"If we sell this debt, this agency will prevail, and the road is going to get built," Krcutzen said.

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