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## Opinion/Editorial

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# SANBAG appreciates bi-partisan support



*By Gary Ovitt, President  
San Bernardino Associated Governments*

It was a victory for the Inland Empire region this week to hear the announcement that \$49 million of California's federal stimulus funds was awarded to continue construction of the I-215 Freeway Widening Project through the City of San Bernardino. This announcement came just two weeks after San Bernardino Associated Governments (SANBAG) decided to invest \$80.6 million of regional federal stimulus funds on the project. We are fortunate that a total of \$129.6 million in federal stimulus funds will come to our region at a time when employment and foreclosure rates are both at an all-time high.

But we would not be celebrating this economic influx of funds today if it were not for the bi-partisan support we received at the federal, state, county and local levels. SANBAG owes deep appreciation to our legislative representatives at all levels and to our colleagues in transportation.

Earlier this year, SANBAG Board members, staff and members of Inland Action, Inc., a group of business people supporting economic vitality in our region, traveled to Washington, D.C. to inform our federal legislators about the need to fund transportation infrastructure projects in the Inland Empire. Subsequently, Congressman Joe Baca and Congressman Jerry Lewis wrote letters to Governor Schwarzenegger supporting SANBAG's

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request for federal stimulus dollars for the I-215 Widening Project in San Bernardino.

SANBAG Board members and staff also met with state legislators. Consequently, members of San Bernardino County's legislative delegation, including Senator Gloria Negrete McLeod, Senator Bob Dutton, Assemblymember Wilmer Amina Carter, Assemblyman Bill Emmerson and Assemblyman Paul Cook, signed joint letters of support to the Governor, stating bi-partisan and community endorsement for this important regional project.

Thanks to Governor Schwarzenegger and his staff for identifying this project as a direct investment in our state's transportation infrastructure that would stimulate California's economy. The Governor's goal is to get the Recovery Act money out the door as quickly as possible to create jobs now and invest in transportation projects that will improve the quality of life in our state and ultimately strengthen our economy.

In an amazing bi-county display of cooperation, the Riverside County Transportation Commission (RCTC) extended their backing for SANBAG's stimulus proposal. RCTC recognized that SANBAG's I-215 project was "shovel ready" and would create jobs in the Inland Empire. We are grateful to our transportation colleagues for this gesture.

We want to thank Caltrans District 8 for advancing the I-215 freeway project quickly through the approval process to ensure it was ready for a timely bid and that it would qualify within the federal stimulus timeline. It is marvelous what we can do by setting goals and all working together.

On the county and local levels, I want to thank my fellow members on the SANBAG Board of Directors (29 members) for recognizing the I-215 Freeway Widening Project as the priority project for our county. The Board's willingness to evaluate the criteria and acknowledge this as our best chance of receiving stimulus funding is greatly appreciated. The next two phases of the I-215 freeway widening project are ready to go to bid in May, with construction starting later this summer.

At their April 1st board meeting, the SANBAG Board unanimously decided to put the funding on the I-215 project. This action demonstrated a unified regional approach for San Bernardino County's transportation planning agency and showed their vision for the future.

The economic benefits will reach far beyond the project boundaries, as it will provide jobs for more than 8,000 people. The overall \$800 million I-215 Freeway Widening Project will continue with construction through the year 2013. Many spin-off benefits and additional job creation will also occur from this project.

In a remarkable 2 ½ months, a tremendous amount of strategic decision-making and hard work brought about this great accomplishment of receiving \$129.6 million in stimulus funds for our region.