Progress on the Bay Bridge Fiasco?

The ongoing Bay Bridge cost overrun saga continues to amaze me. The $2.1 billion seismic retrofit is now a $6.2 billion project, and it's not even completed yet.

Thankfully, our Southern California delegation is with us on this one and supporting the governor's position that Bay Area lawmakers need to go with the less costly design. Cost effectiveness and earthquake safety must be the top priorities. If Bay Area commuters want an expensive design, that's fine. Just don't ask us to pay for it.

But the message does not seem to be getting through to Bay Area lawmakers. Senate President Darrell Steinberg (D-Oakland) proposed that the toll on this bridge be increased by one dollar and the rest of the cost overruns be covered by a state bond. (Gov. Schwarzenegger is willing to contribute $300 million, but that is all.)

The toll hike is the right thing to do. A bond is okay, too, but any such bond should be limited to the Bay Area taxpayers, not for the entire state. It is good to see that Sen. Perata and other Bay Area lawmakers are no longer seeking state transportation money to pay for the cost overruns, but now we have to convince them to abandon the effort to have the state—meaning all California taxpayers—pay for anymore of it.

What our friends to the north have to remember is they decided to proceed with the Cadillac of bridges when a Ford would have worked just as well. Those of us outside of the Bay Area had no say in the matter, as a local commission selected by Mayors Willie Brown and Jerry Brown decided which design they liked best. I doubt any of them asked out loud if including taxpayers from other parts of the state was the right thing to do in their decision making process.

Therefore, it's unfair to ask us to fork over $3-4 billion that we simply don't have. Just go with the simpler design already!

You would think that the Bay Area, which is home to both of our state's U.S. Senators and President Bush's transportation secretary, could have turned to the federal government for assistance. The fact that the feds are not interested in bailing them out on this makes me perfectly willing to pay more in taxes on much-needed projects, when I see the foolhardy ways taxpayer money is spent—or misspent, as with the Cadillac of bridges when a Ford would have worked just as well.

Sen. Perata is right to ask his constituents to pay an extra dollar in transportation tax hikes, and certainly not a bond to pay for someone else's mistake.

Sen. Perata is right to ask his constituents to pay an extra dollar in tolls for the Bay Bridge. Now he should urge his constituents to support a local bond to complete the bridge and pay for the design they want. If they really want the coattail bridge, they'll vote to pay for it on their own.

And that's the Business Perspective.

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