



Are Politicians Ready for This Line of Argument?

Posted by [Prof. Goose](#) on December 3, 2006 - 2:17pm

Topic: [Environment/Sustainability](#)

Tags: [peak oil](#), [well](#), [willits](#) [[list all tags](#)]

This is a guest post by [Jason Bradford](#).

Willits CA has been getting a lot of attention in the peak oil sphere. Much of this attention is my fault. I moved here in 2004 with the goal of rallying a real town/city towards greater economic self-reliance, reduced pollution, etc. in order to get off the fossil fuel addiction.¹ My attitude just before moving to Willits was similar to the fireman character in the movie *I Heart Huckabees*², which I highly recommend ya'll see. This can be summed up as pissed off, fearful, and self righteous. Sometimes I still feel those ways. Right now in fact. Hence my "tone" throughout. I will probably ask for forgiveness later, something I am well practiced at.

Anyhow, this group formed called Willits Economic Localization (WELL)³ and it certainly helped raise my spirits a bit. Surrounded by motivated, like-minded people, I feel like I am getting to work on solutions and speaking honestly and openly about the predicament we are in. Folks are paying attention.

But Willits is not some unified eco-sanctuary of relocalized economic harmonic convergence (though the press can make it seem so). This place has a history, and divisions. Including a gargantuan freeway project that is nearly ready to go.

Those of us I consider sane were hoping this project would die of its own immensity as the inflation rate exceeded 25% per year and the cost became so astronomical that of course everyone else on the planet would see things our way. In the meantime, we have undertaken a massive education process in Willits and throughout Mendocino County. There are groups similar to WELL in nearly all population centers of the county and in neighboring counties.⁴ Given the broader awareness of peak oil and climate change, wouldn't projects like this begin to appear as liabilities rather than assets? Would the madness end?

Apparently not.

California voters passed a series of humongous bonds, including one for billions towards freeway projects. Remember, this is the same state being looked at for leadership on environmental issues, including energy efficiency standards, subsidies for renewable energy technologies, and commitments to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. What do you think, is this a fantastic example of cognitive dissonance and mass delusion?⁵

So WELL was asked to take a position on the bypass. I drew upon the history of research from long-time activists in the area and received much constructive feedback to write this letter to our political decision makers and the relevant state agencies. There is a small window for the political

process to work to avert this project. Either the local officials can say we no longer think this is a good idea, please give us a new option, or the state officials can say this costs too much and there are better options.

The leverage point at the state level is the California Transportation Commission, which would release funds for the project. If you live in CA and think a 5.6 mile, 4 lane freeway to handle about 7000 vehicles per day, covering 140 acres of ag land with 1.3 million cubic yards of fill costing about \$260 million dollars, and rising, is a bad idea, let these folks know:

<http://www.catc.ca.gov/>

Contact CTC

1120 N Street

Room 2221 (MS-52)

Sacramento, CA 95814

Telephone: (916) 654-4245

FAX: (916) 653-2134

Perhaps argue that a little place like Willits really doesn't need such a big project and you'd rather they spend the money where you live!

Nearly all transportation alternatives around here, for which much planning has been done, are not funded. They are not funded because the bulk of discretionary funds given to Mendocino County by the State of California (STIP) are allocated to major freeway projects. Not just the Willits bypass, but next in line is the Hopland bypass.

I get a bit fired up about this because it makes me lose what little hope I have. If people can not take in new information and use that to reassess their plans and expectations then we are pretty much done for. As a scientist, I was trained to think critically and report to others what we know and don't know. Scientists are open to changing their minds based on evidence and I guess we assume that's how other people operate. If only it were that simple. But all I know how to do is keep trying.

Endnotes:

1. <http://www.globalpublicmedia.com/interviews/434>
2. <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0356721/>
3. <http://www.willitseconomiclocalization.org/> and an updated site <http://willits.postcarbon.org/>
4. See the hypercluster in northwestern CA: http://postcarbon.org/_tmp_maps/NorthAmericaOutpostsImageMap.html
5. <http://www.energybulletin.net/3948.html>



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