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## LOCAL NEWS

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Monday, November 22, 2004

# State OKs $2 million for Myra extension

**The proposed project will extend Myra Road north from its intersection with Rose Street to U.S. 12.**

By Andy Porter of the Union-Bulletin

A project to connect two major highways in Walla Walla County has received a nearly $2 million boost.

The state Transportation Improvement Board Friday approved a $1.96 million grant for the Myra Road extension project, a step local officials said is vital to getting the long-planned project off the drawing board.

The project will extend Myra Road north from its intersection with Rose Street to U.S. Highway 12. The extension, which has an estimated $10.7 million price tag, would provide a more direct route between U.S. Highway 12 and State Route 125, which leads to Milton-Freewater.

Entities backing the project are Walla Walla County, the cities of Walla Walla and College Place, the Port of Walla Walla and Valley Transit.

Friday's move by the board was vital for the project, county and city of Walla Walla officials said.

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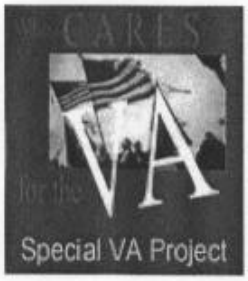


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``This was the first hurdle to get over with regards to funding,' said Hal Thomas, city of Walla Walla Public Works director.

The board's grant will help pay for design and right of way acqusition for the first phase of the project, which would extend from Spitzenberg Road to Electric Avenue, said Phil Merrell, Walla Walla County Public Works director.

Thomas said the grant ``gives us the ability to start moving forward in earnest to come up with a route that will take all considerations into account, including citizens' concerns.'

Walla Walla County Commissioners Greg Tompkins and Dave Carey said the grant approval came about through a combination of persistence on the part of city and county staff and the united front presented by project backers.

``(This) just shows once again that when governmental entities work together for the common good, instead of opposing each other, great accomplishments can happen,' Tompkins said today.

The progress of a project to widen U.S. Highway 12 to four lanes between Walla Walla to Burbank also played a part, Tompkins noted.

Merrell said that while ``the pieces of the jigsaw puzzle are still coming together' regarding how the project will be funded, the situation looks promising.

``Of all the different funding scenarios we looked at with the elected officials two weeks ago, this is the best we could have expected,' he said in reference to a Nov. 9 joint meeting of the cities, county and Port.

Working with Transportation Improvement Board staff, Merrell said city and county engineering staffs broke the project into three phases. The funds approved Friday are for fiscal year 2006 and the county, which is the lead agency, wil re-apply for additional funds next year and the year after.

Created by the state Legislature, the Transportation Improvement Board awards grants for transportation projects on a competitive basis. The board's grant programs are funded by about 3 cents of the state's 28-cent-per-gallon gas tax.

In a related development, the Myra Road project is in line

**to receive another boost thanks to a recommendation from the state Freight Mobility Strategic Investment Board, Merrell said.**

**The board recommended $1 million be approved to begin work to bridge Mill Creek where the road crosses the stream, he said. However, those funds still need to be approved by the state Legislature when it meets next year.**

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