

**Pat Dellin**

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**From:** Kim Shultz  
**Sent:** Monday, September 13, 2004 10:08 AM  
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## **Dan Walters: Traffic gets worse as lawmakers shift transportation funds**

**By Dan Walters -- Bee Columnist**  
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The "Inland Empire" region of Southern California - Riverside and San Bernardino counties - achieved a dubious distinction the other day.

The Texas Transportation Institute elevated, if that's the word, the region into the list of the nation's five most traffic-congested areas - and it found itself in familiar company. The adjacent Los Angeles region (including portions of Orange and Ventura counties) retained its long-standing title as the nation's most congested, and the San Francisco Bay Area continued in its No. 2 ranking.

Understanding California's dominance of the traffic jam sweepstakes doesn't take a degree in astrophysics. Simple arithmetic will suffice.

A decade ago, Californians were operating just over 26 million registered vehicles. Today more than 31 million vehicles (including 20.6 million cars and 7.3 million trucks) call California home.

That 5 million-vehicle increase works out to more than 1,300 every 24 hours and roughly approximates the state's population growth during the period - a one-person-one-car factor that is puzzling unto itself. California has several million more cars and trucks than licensed drivers, in fact.

As more human beings are born in or migrate to California, as the economy continues to evolve into a postindustrial mode, and as housing becomes more expensive, Californians find themselves making ever-longer automotive commutes. And as rapidly as people and vehicles proliferate, therefore, automobile and truck traffic is growing even faster. Vehicular traffic has doubled in California in the last two decades, a period in which the overall population increased by perhaps 40 percent. More people, more cars and much more driving, however, are packed into a road and highway system that has been expanding at a snail's pace, thanks to shortsighted political decision-making in Sacramento and other hotbeds of policy procrastination.

In an era when traffic is increasing geometrically, those who ran for office on their promises to take care of the public's needs have actually been reducing the funds available for building new highways, maintaining the overstressed, potholed roadways we already use, or expanding mass transit as an alternative to behind-the-wheel travel. And we are letting them get away with it.

A few years ago, when the state was wallowing in dot-com dollars, then-Gov. Gray Davis proposed to divert a relative few of them into "traffic congestion relief." That was a pretty good idea, even if the projects chosen for financing were designated in the Governor's Office, rather than through the regular

planning process, and included several with questionable ties, such as an interchange to serve an Indian gambling casino that had contributed substantially to Davis' campaign fund.

A few of those few dollars were actually spent before Davis and the Legislature found themselves staring into a fiscal abyss (thanks to overspending the rest of the dot-com windfall on permanent programs and tax cuts). The remaining transportation dollars were quickly diverted back into the general fund to cover rapidly growing deficits, many hundreds of millions of regular gas tax funds suffered the same fate, and even after voters decreed that sales taxes on gasoline should be spent on transportation, those dollars were also diverted.

Davis' successor, Arnold Schwarzenegger, is making much of an increase in transportation spending in the 2004-05 budget, but the significance of the supposed boost fades when one examines the fine print. The state will take an additional \$1.2 billion from the gasoline sales tax while repaying \$1.4 billion to the various highway accounts that had been diverted previously, almost all of which would originate in payments from Indian gambling casinos. In other words, slightly improving transportation financing is now dependent on Californians losing more money after driving to casinos.

Transportation has slowed to a crawl to cover up politicians' foolish behavior - California is now dead last in per capita spending among the states - while the state suffers from the nation's worst traffic congestion.

Why do we Californians tolerate this shell game while wasting countless millions of hours of our lives stuck in traffic?

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