

# Taking Issue

problematic recent environmental commentary & coverage in our local press

“From planning to traffic, Measure J passes the tests”  
*The Tribune*, October 15, 2006

Summary: The Tribune claims the Dalidio Ranch project is necessary to fund traffic projects, that bond funding will pay for the developer's shortfall, environmental concerns will be addressed by “county plan checking” and the permit process, and Measure J opponents “are not letting facts get in the way of their arguments.”

We don't like land-use planning decisions being made through the initiative process; yet, having seen Dalidio whipsawed for 14 years, we understand his frustration and why he chose that channel for project approval.

[The bond funding/taxing district plan] wouldn't cost taxpayers a dime.

If Dalidio had submitted a project that complied with the City Land Use Element and had an adequate Environmental Impact Report, he could have succeeded long ago instead of failing repeatedly.

Measure J does not call for or include a Target or Lowe's. No specific tenants are mentioned in the Measure. According to the terms of the initiative, future owners may change the tenants they actually bring in.

Target and Lowe's would be the anchor stores for the Dalidio Ranch

Ballot box planning has already occurred in the county: Voters approved the Williams Bros. shopping center in Paso Robles in 1980 after the city denied the project.

That was a local -- as in city -- vote on a city project. The Dalidio Ranch Initiative is a County vote on a local project which primarily affects a city.

Studies -- and common sense -- show that traffic problems already exist at the Madonna-101 and Los Osos Valley Road-101 interchanges. These arteries will become unacceptable clogged in another decade regardless of whether a Dalidio project is built. The answer to that dismal prospect is to build a Prado Road overpass...

“The SLOCOG staff has called Measure J's numbers insufficient to pay for changes to road systems that will be needed to handle the added traffic. A March 2006 Caltrans analysis

predicted that the Dalidio project would generate 30,800 average daily trips.” [- “What Measure J does – and does not include,” *The Tribune*, Oct. 23, 2006.]  
The project is so big that severe, unmitigated traffic impacts would occur even *with* the Prado Road interchange. With the project and the Prado/101 interchange, LOVR/Madonna and Prado/Higuera intersections fall below “D” level of service, and all of the 101 ramp queuing is worse. The latest EIR shows we'd be better off with no development and no interchange. Without the Dalidio Ranch, we don't need the Prado interchange. It's only purpose is to service the development of Dalidio Ranch. Upgrading infrastructure we already have -- i.e. the LOVR bridge and interchange -- would fix existing traffic problems, and that upgrade is already in the pipeline. The new capacity added by the Prado Interchange is not even sufficient to serve the new demand added by the project.

Measure J deserves voter approval because it will fulfill the longstanding vision conceived by smart government planners more than a decade ago.

Measure J violates the City and County General Plans. The 1994 vision of smart government planners called for half the property to be preserved as open space. Measure J would pave more than two-thirds of the land under big box retail, hotel, and parking lot.



Dalidio's proposed solution to bridge the large gap between the funding offered through the initiative and the actual (fast-rising) cost of the interchange is verbal. It is a campaign promise, not part of the initiative, whose language could not change once it was circulated. There is no way a vote for the initiative would bring into being any promise not explicitly written into the initiative. The problems are there; the solutions aren't. And larking real environmental review, there is no way to measure the practicability or effectiveness of any proposed solution. Dalidio's proposed bond to fund the Prado interchange would divert County funding from improvement of the LOVR-101 interchange, as well as from Willow Road-101, Brisco Road-101, and Highway 46-101. Anyone living outside the city of SLO supporting Measure J would be voting to cut into the economic viability and infrastructure development of their own town.

Dalidio then sought input from an advisory group of community leaders. Vic Montgomery, a principal of RRM Design Group, re-designed a master-planned project, adopting many of the group's suggestions.

There was a single meeting of the “Lenthall committee” for the general public, attended by about 60 people, a rather small fraction of the County's population. Most of those attending that meeting wanted to preserve as much of the ag land as possible at the Dalidio site. The RRM design team responded to that input by *reducing* the amount of on-site open space to the current design's 30%.

Measure J locks into place 103 conditions that were taken from the original certified environmental impact report on Dalidio's 2005 Marketplace proposal.

In the EIR for the previous Marketplace proposal -- a significantly different project from the Dalidio Ranch proposal -- the traffic impacts were listed as “Class 1,” meaning not all impacts could be mitigated. The current project will have similar impacts, but there will be no Environmental Impact Report to discover and resolve these major traffic impacts. The 2004 EIR, at the request of the developer, was *decertified* by the City in order to nullify a lawsuit over the inadequacy of the EIR. County residents thus will never know whether the EIR on any previous Dalidio project was adequate, because there is no certified EIR for any previously proposed Dalidio project. Even if there were, it could not be transferred to this project.

Opponents say Measure J means the project will avoid the scrutiny of environmental regulators. That's simply not true... The project will be subjected to the stringent nuts and bolts of county plan checking and building permit processes and the project must fully conform to myriad state and federal environmental regulations... Measure J doesn't circumvent environmental review at all.

Let's hope the *Tribune's* editorial board reads their newspaper's news stories:  
“But the project does not fall under the California Environmental Quality Act. In the normal government process, CEQA is triggered by a request to amend the General Plan and approve a project review. Measure J eliminates that requirement because it is a citizens' initiative. Because it does not go through traditional county procedures such as General Plan review, and thus is not subject to CEQA, the Dalidio Ranch project will not face any public hearings at the county Planning Commission or Board of Supervisors. It also avoids environmental review by the county and specific review by the county staff on such matters as architecture, signs and landscaping. ...”  
“Some concerns will be covered under state law — how to handle naturally occurring asbestos or lead paint in demolished buildings, for example. Others — such as idling trucks from construction — will not be dealt with, according to Aeron Arlin Genet, planning manager for the district. Those fall under the CEQA, she said, and because Measure J is a citizens' initiative, it does not have to face the CEQA process. Genet says the county will have to rely on the good will of the developer in those cases.”

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-- “What Measure J does – and does not include,” *The Tribune*, Oct. 23

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