



# Editorials

## Roadblock relief

10:00 PM PDT on Thursday, April 19, 2007

Taxpayers emerged as the clear winners in the state Supreme Court's ruling on Prop. 35 last week. The decision properly frees California to use the most cost-effective, timely approach to making traffic improvements.

The court upheld Caltrans' authority to contract with private engineering firms for work on public projects, powers voters approved with Prop. 35 in 2000. The state engineers union sued in 2002, stalling the measure in court until last week.

This case was only incidentally about the best way to provide public works. The state engineers union hoped to preserve a near monopoly on transportation work, while private engineers wanted access to billions of dollars in public spending.

But which engineers work on transportation projects is a side issue. The ruling's crucial import is that California now has the freedom to pick the most efficient way to provide public works. Surely, most Californians care far less about who handles projects than they do about easing traffic congestion as quickly as possible.

The state's legislative analyst notes that Caltrans would have to add 4,800 workers to handle the projects funded by November's \$19.9 billion transportation bond. That prospect is not realistic. Nor should the state abide long delays in needed traffic improvements just to safeguard public employees' jobs.

And while the union argues that state engineers can work more cheaply than private firms, the state's backlog slows progress on projects, which creates substantial public costs.

The legal battle over Prop. 35 had more to do with union and business concerns than the public interest, anyway. Californians want better-flowing traffic and easier commutes, not a time-consuming fight over which professionals do the technical work.

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