



The Delta Tunnel: An Environmental Justice Debacle

Constructing and operating a massive tunnel that diverts fresh water from the Delta will only add to and worsen environmental justice conditions in Delta communities. The single tunnel will decrease the quality of life for Delta communities and add to the region's economic distress.



Who lives in the Delta?

The heart of the Bay-Delta region is comprised of five counties: Contra Costa, Sacramento, San Joaquin, Solano, and Yolo. The region has nearly 4 million residents, 34% of whom live in low-income areas overburdened with air and water pollution.

Low-income communities and communities of color comprise a significant number of residents throughout all Delta counties. In 2018, two counties, Sacramento and San Joaquin, had poverty rates that exceeded the national poverty rate. In Sacramento County, the poverty rate was 16.7%, compared with the national average of 13.2%. In San Joaquin County, the poverty rate was 17.1%. Poverty in this county is primarily concentrated in the city of Stockton, where the poverty rate was 22.4%.

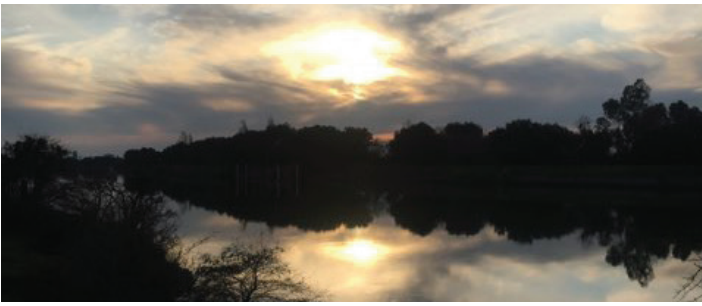
How will communities be impacted by the tunnel?

The quality of life for Delta communities will decline if the single tunnel is built and operated.

Water Quality

The tunnel will facilitate diversions from rivers, reducing Delta freshwater flows, degrading water quality for Delta communities in the process. Freshwater flows are critical in flushing out pollutants and preventing the proliferation of Harmful Algal Blooms (HABs). Algal blooms that produce both air and water toxins that are dangerous to humans and wildlife. These blooms are caused by discharge from industry, municipal water systems, and agriculture mixing with warm, still water. Additionally, more pollutants and HABs will increase contamination in fish populations that are a regular source of food for many Delta residents.

Freshwater flows also mitigate against saltwater intrusion. That intrusion can cause increased salinity in Delta waters, impacting water supplies for communities.



Family farmers in the Delta will not be able to use the highly-salinated water to irrigate crops. And without advanced treatment, drinking water quality in many Delta communities will decline.

Construction will also affect water quality. During construction, hundreds of thousands of tons of tunnel muck—a mixture of soil, water, air, and other chemicals to soften soil—must be removed during tunnel excavation and dumped somewhere. This will likely be areas where the liquid muck will sit and percolate into groundwater.

Air Quality

Though the Department of Water Resources is currently considering two alignments for the single tunnel, both alignments will degrade air quality in a region that currently does not meet air quality standards.

Southwest Stockton, an area in close proximity to the proposed eastern corridor option for the tunnel, is heavily impacted by large freeways, the Port of Stockton, freight locomotives, and emissions traveling downwind from the northern portion of the city. The California Air Resources Board recently designated the area as one of the most impacted by air pollution. CalEnviroScreen ranks the area in the top 5% of the most disadvantaged communities in California.

Tunnel construction, estimated to take no less than 15 years, will make this worse. Emissions from hundreds of trucks, barges, and freight trains moving materials to and from construction sites will emit more dust and increase traffic near major Delta highways, including I-5, Highway 4, and Highway 99. These pollutants will inevitably mix with emissions from commuters. It is estimated that 30,000 people commute from

Stockton to Sacramento and 40,000 to the Bay Area daily. There have not been any regional traffic studies conducted analyzing how congested Delta highways will become or the amount of concentrated pollutants that will be increased. Operation of the tunnel will also affect air quality since more HAPs will appear and their toxins will become airborne.

Cost

The cost of the tunnel is currently estimated to be about \$11 billion but could be as high as \$60 billion with inflation and anticipated cost overruns by the time the project is complete. That cost will have a significant impact on the water rates for communities both in the Delta and south of the Delta.

Less fresh water will flow through the Delta, forcing Delta communities to pay more for clean water for their everyday needs. Farmworker communities in the south San Joaquin Valley will also see increased water rates due to rising costs of water regardless of whether their water agency invested in the tunnel or not due to the cost of water imports increasing. And low-income communities around Los Angeles and San Diego that receive water from the Metropolitan Water District (the primary funder of the project) will see their water rates increase even though it is certain these communities will not receive any new water from the tunnel as their cities implement more conservation and recycling programs.

Finally, during the tunnel's construction, which could take up to 15 years, communities in its path will be seriously disrupted. Road closures and traffic entanglements will significantly reduce commerce in the region.

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