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## Our View: In the dark over 710 tunnel

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In the matter of whether or not to complete the gap in the Long Beach (710) Freeway, which was planned long ago to connect with the Foothill (210) Freeway in Pasadena and never did, it used to be mostly the preservationists and tree lovers of South Pasadena fighting the project.

Forty years on, the surface-level proposal lost all steam when it became clear that there just wasn't money for the project or a will to find some at the state and federal levels.

Then, several years ago, when a scheme was announced to not only close the gap with an innovative, extremely deep tunnel but to use private money to do so, it seemed that there might be some forward movement.

Little tax money expended, no houses or towering, shade-giving camphors razed - what's not to like, right?

South Pas's fabled freeway fighters were still not so sure. There was something about the deal that still bothered. Ventilation from the tunnel? Crashes down there? Maybe it was just hard to give up on the crusade. Then, more or less out of nowhere, two other cities have taken the lead in the debate.

Glendale, which we hadn't even known had a

whit of interest in the matter, suddenly saw its City Council in late July vote to oppose the tunnel idea. Its city staff said that if the 710 were to go through, traffic would increase by more than 30,000 vehicles a day on the 210 north of the Ventura (134) Freeway in northern Glendale and La Crescenta.

It also said that there would be 2,500 more daily truck trips on the 210 between the 134 and the Glendale (2) Freeway and that there would also be a lot more truck traffic on other area highways. We recall when gap-closure proponents agreed to ban all truck traffic from the completed 710. But no matter how many times they say it, it seems few believe that that scenario could really come true. The Port of Long Beach has long sought a way to have offloaded freight head straight north and avoid the gridlocked Interstate 5 - the 710 would simply be too attractive a route. And it's also hard to believe that a toll-levying tunnel run by a private company could afford to turn away high-paying truck traffic.

The truck issue has long been the reason that La Ca ada Flintridge has been skeptical about the gap closure. The 210 descends steeply through the city, and trucks must hit the brakes - with a bellow heard throughout western Pasadena and Altadena as well.

Now Assemblyman Anthony Portantino, D-La Ca ada Flintridge, is upping his attack on the tunnel plans. He likens the effort to Boston's troubled "Big Dig." And he asks, in a completely separate trucking issue related to the years-long period of

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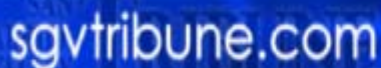
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tunnel construction, "Where are the dump trucks going to take all that dirt?"

Rep. Adam Schiff, D-Pasadena, secured \$3.4 million a couple of years ago for a "route-neutral" freeway feasibility study. What is really bothering Portantino these days, he says, is that he believes Caltrans and Metro are intentionally ignoring a firm proviso attached to that funding: "While this proposal is worthy of exploration, it is essential that we do not delay more immediate traffic improvements in the interim."

And he's ticked that after promising the La Cañada Flintridge City Council, on which Portantino formerly served, that its members could read a proposed draft scope of work on the tunnel feasibility study, the MTA later reneged "on the advice of counsel." But, says Portantino, MTA went forward to "publicly posture as if the cities in the corridor were consulted on the draft scope of work."

The assemblyman says he wonders about continuing to spend money on more such studies when other regional projects on which everyone agrees, such as the Gold Line, are stalled and underfunded.

It's a healthy dose of skepticism about a project that once again seems nothing like a done deal.

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