

Caltrans spending \$11 billion on California highways

By Gary Richards, San Jose Mercury News

Kelly McDonough was in for a pleasant surprise when she turned onto Interstate 880 in San Jose recently during the morning commute. The bumps, potholes and deep cracks that for years have lined this dilapidated freeway between Interstate 280 and Highway 101 were gone – replaced by dreamy, dark asphalt.



“The road surface is magically improved,” McDonough said. “Great job!”

Highways from the Bay Area to Lake Tahoe to the Central Coast are being repaved this summer at a pace not seen in years, even though the state and nation are coming out of a deep recession with major budget problems.

Spurred by an infusion of federal stimulus money, state bonds and millions of dollars in savings from low bids, segments of nearly every local freeway are being resurfaced, plus much of Interstates 5 and 80. Head out for a nighttime drive and you’ll almost certainly run into a cone zone.

“There is a near-record amount of Caltrans activity going on right now, nearly \$11 billion statewide,” said Russell Snyder, executive director of the California Asphalt Pavement Association.

He said Caltrans has been able to pave rough roads that might otherwise be on a long waiting list because of savings on bid prices of about 30 percent – “the silver lining to the Great Recession,” Snyder called it.

There is more at play, say numerous transportation officials. The condition of California's highways is among the worst in the nation, with just 28 percent rated in good condition. There's an urgency to fix them now, when money is available, rather than pay much more for bigger repairs down the road.

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