

The Caltrans project at Richardson Grove and a related project on Route 199 in Del Norte have been getting attention again lately as a result of a new local group called the Coalition for Responsible Transportation Priorities. This group has published two op-eds in the Times-Standard in the last few weeks. The more recent piece called out these two projects—which are designed to allow the biggest trucks on the road greater access to our counties—as incompatible with the most viable model for local economic development, a model which the author called the “rural creative class economy.”

In a community comment a couple of weeks ago, Erin Dunn questioned what the “creative class” really is. Well, “creative class” is just economic development speak for people with the entrepreneurial spirit. We’re talking about the kind of creativity you need to start your own business and chart your own course, to be an independent contractor or consultant, to do web design or healthcare work or engineering or education. Those are the kinds of people who make up the so-called “creative class economy” that the op-ed was calling for.

The Humboldt Business Confidence Report published last month recommended strategies for future economic development. The strategies were about improving our local quality of life and cultivating our high-tech infrastructure and our ability to support long-distance telecommuting consultants and “knowledge professionals” —the “creative class” in other words.

So what does all of this have to do with the Richardson Grove project and its ilk? Well, these projects come out of a 20<sup>th</sup> century mindset —a mindset that says our economy must be based on exporting goods or commodities. But everyone today who takes a serious look at our economy and our location far from all the big cities knows that our most prominent exports in the future will be services, not goods—or if they are goods, they will be light-weight, high-value goods. An economic development strategy based on moving ever-greater quantities of physical products in and out of our region will continue to be limited.

Of course, there will always be goods imported and exported. But our current roads are sufficient to handle most of the required truck movement, and for the biggest trucks, current construction on Route 299 will provide a direct route to I-5 as soon as next year. So the question is, for the small number of businesses who want more access to these bigger trucks, for whom 299 will not be enough –

well, is supporting those few businesses with millions of our tax dollars really our top priority? Is it really the way to support a successful local economy? I think the Coalition for Responsible Transportation Priorities has it right—let's cancel the projects at Richardson Grove and Route 199 and make smarter transportation investments with the limited dollars available.