2-Year Schedule Step-Up in Feather River Project Seen
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To Meet Timetable, State Must Accelerate Work on 20 Individual Jobs

BY RAY HEBERT, Times Urban Plans Editor

Preliminary revisions in the construction timetable for the $1.75 billion Feather River Project could send Northern California water pouring into Los Angeles County in 1970—two years ahead of schedule.

But there is no change in the "turn-on" date for the faucet on the other leg of the California Aqueduct serving San Bernardino, Riverside and San Diego Counties. Deliveries should begin there in 1972.

The tentative schedules were contained in a new timetable prepared by the State Department of Water Resources for the water development project — the world's largest — approved by the voters last November.

But the timetable may be too optimistic. To meet it, the state must accelerate and maintain a gigantic construction program involving concurrent work on 20 or more individual projects.

William Warne, water resources director, ackowledges the scope of the job ahead.

"This is a killing schedule, but not an impossible one," he explained. "A good start has been made."

Largest Customer

But because of the project's size, an engineer familiar with the undertaking said it may run as much as four or five years behind schedule.

Should this happen, Southern California would find itself in even more serious straits than anticipated if the U.S. Supreme Court upholds the water apportionment formula recommended in the long-standing California-Arizona Colorado River case.

An adverse ruling could mean the annual Southern California loss of 1 million or more acre feet of water. The Metropolitan Water District, which serves the populous Los Angeles and San Diego metropolitan areas, would sustain much of the loss.

Significantly, MWD is the largest potential customer for water to be delivered through the state-developed Feather River Project.

The district has already contracted for 1.5 million acre ft. a year and will be counting heavily on this supplemental supply, not only to offset possible Colorado River losses but also to meet the growing demands in its six-county service area.

Because of the uncertainty over the Colorado River supply, most water experts regard the timing of Northern California water deliveries here as "extremely critical."

To forestall a possible delay, the state has already

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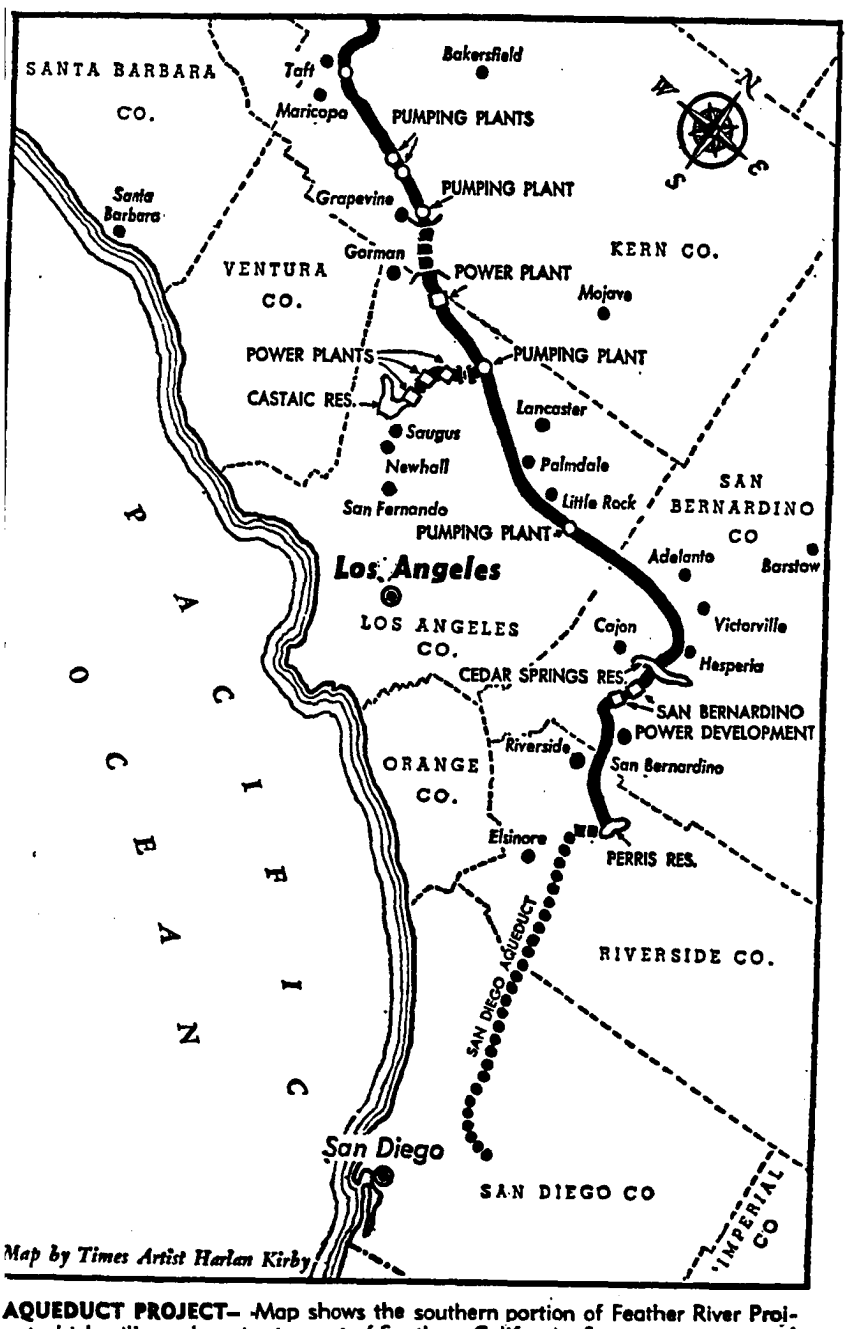

AQUEDUCT PROJECT— Map shows the southern portion of Feather River Project which will supply water to most of Southern California. State expects to spend some $600 million on this portion of aqueduct system with the largest amount going to East Branch feeding San Bernardino, Riverside and San Diego Counties.

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adopted a stepped-up planning, design—and in some cases — construction schedule. It was put into effect even as Northern California legislators, apparently still not resigned to the project, attempted to delay and impair it with legislation described as "at cross purposes with the state water plan."

Dam to Be Finished

According to the latest timetable issued by Warne's office, Frenchman Dam — in Plumas County above Oroville Dam—will be completed this summer, the first facility in the project program to reach that state.

In August, the state expects to open bids for clearing the reservoir and dam site where big Oroville Dam, key unit in the water plan, will start rising next year. Later this year, contracts will be awarded for the construction of two diversion tunnels to carry the Feather River around the dam site.

Late next year, the state expects to complete the $65 million job of relocating a Western Pacific railroad line and a highway which wind through the Feather River Canyon behind the Oroville Dam site.

Five Tunnels

To date, Warne said, all five tunnels on the railroad's spectacular new alignment have been "holed through." Two have been completed. Work on the other three is on schedule. Two multimillion dollar railroad bridges were completed last summer while another — the 480-ft. high West Branch Bridge— is taking shape in the steep canyon.

The first work on Oroville Dam, a 735 ft. high water storage and flood control facility, will involve embankment construction, probably starting — ahead of schedule — in early 1963. Work on the spillway will begin in 1964. Water should start backing up behind the dam — 25 ft. higher than Hoover Dam — in 1968.

This is the way other phases of the statewide project look at this stage:

South Bay Aqueduct — Livermore Valley, east of Oakland, will receive its first water deliveries through this facility in 1962.

San Luis Dam and Reservoir — Blasting for this 2-million-acre-ft. holding reservoir near Los Banos on the route of the main California Aqueduct will begin in 1963. A joint federal-state project, it will cost some $400 million.

Backbone Feature

California Aqueduct — Some right-of-way has already been acquired for this backbone feature of the water development project. It will channel water from the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta, down the length of the San Joaquin Valley and across the Tehachapi Mountains into Southern California.

Coastal Aqueduct — Water deliveries through this transmountain line, connecting with the main aqueduct at Avenal Gap, are tentatively scheduled for 1980, although this target may be moved up, or delayed, depending upon the demand for water. The coastal branch will serve Monterey, San Luis Obispo and Santa Barbara Counties.

Warne said Kern County, at the southern end of the San Joaquin Valley, should receive its first water deliveries in 1968.

Mountain Barrier

By 1965, he said, the state expects to start drilling through the Tehachapi Mountains to extend the California Aqueduct into Southern California. To get the water over this natural barrier, a series of pumping plants will lift it from the valley floor to an elevation of 3,167 ft. — highest lift ever undertaken in such a project.

South of the Tehachapis, the aqueduct's short West Branch will cut south through Elizabeth Lake Canyon, ending at Castaic Reservoir on Castaic Creek. Work on this 100,000 acre ft. storage basin north of the San Fernando Valley will begin in 1967. By 1970, if the timetable is met, MWD may be able to siphon its initial deliveries of water from the reservoir for Los Angeles and Orange Counties.

The East Branch — 116 miles from its cutoff point south of the Tehachapis to the proposed terminal reservoir at Perris — will slice across the Antelope Valley and Mojave Desert. Water will empty into Cedar Springs Reservoir, north of San Bernardino, and from there will be pumped through the San Bernardino Mountains for the final run to Perris Reservoir.

Will Start in 1965

Under the timetable set up for work south of the Tehachapis, construction of the canal in Antelope Valley and Mojave Desert will start in 1965. Two years later, work at Cedar Springs will get under way and crews will be busy at Perris in 1970.

The state expects to spend more than $600 million on facilities to shoot the water over and through the Tehachapi Mountains and send it to its terminal points at Castaic and Perris Reservoirs.

A preliminary breakdown shows that $105 million will be spent on the Tehachapi pumping plants, $99 million at the Tehachapi summit, $110 million on West Branch construction and $316 million on the East Branch.

Bulk of Payments

The bulk of the costs, of course, will be paid by MWD. But the district expects to contribute generously to the entire project, although it is being developed on a statewide scale. As Warne puts it:

"The benefits, particularly those from recreational aspects of the project, will be shared by residents from every corner of the state, whether they be water users from a consumption standpoint or not.

"The benefits to the overall economy of the state will be shared by everyone."