



# Colorado River bridge is needed for safety, economy

**I**T'S disappointing, although not surprising, that construction of a new bridge over the Colorado River will be on hold until the next century.

The bridge, which would allow traffic to bypass the congested and dangerous Hoover Dam, has been delayed in uncertainties over who will pay for the \$130 million span. Nevada and Arizona have offered \$7 million apiece in cash and in-kind services, but that falls far short of the 50 percent needed as the states' share.

As a result the Bureau of Reclamation has abandoned the search for funds but some studies on the three possible bridge sites will continue. All agencies, state and federal, are short of funding for such capital projects and the delay of a new span on U.S. 93 is certainly understandable.

But a crying need exists to prevent heavy trucks and other through traffic from snaking along the top of the dam jammed with pedestrians. Hoover Dam is a popular tourist attraction that brings busloads of visitors who regularly walk across the highway.

Moreover, hazardous materials shipments across the dam increase the risk of a tragedy occurring there. A gasoline explosion, for example, would endanger visitors touring the

inside of the massive dam.

There seems to be no realistic alternative other than constructing an entirely new bridge. The Clinton administration should consider the construction as a new jobs project to help get Arizona's and Nevada's economies moving again. Similar reasoning resulted in the construction of the Hoover Dam in the 1930s which boosted the local economy.

The project would create many construction jobs for several years and help get Nevada moving on its way again. It would give Las Vegas tourism a shot in the arm. Visitors from Phoenix and other Arizona cities often find the worst part of the trip is the few miles on each side of, and over, Hoover Dam.

If the North American Free Trade Agreement between Mexico, the United States and Canada is ratified – a longshot at best – a four-lane route from Interstate 15 at Las Vegas to Mexico, through Phoenix, could be a new-found asset. That route is one of two area corridors being studied to encourage increased commerce with Mexico.

The way southeast of Las Vegas is the poorest link this city has to its neighbors. The snake-like route over the dam should be replaced with a decent, four-lane highway as soon as possible.