

## Santa Barbara Water Agencies Say No to State Water Tunnel Project

*Latest state plan would have a single tunnel to move water past the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta*

*Giana Magnoli, Noozhawk Managing Editor  
October 23, 2019 | 7:25 p.m.*

Local water agencies aren't buying into the new version of the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta "twin tunnels" project, and Santa Barbara County members of the [State Water Project](#) voted Thursday to opt out entirely.

The [California Department of Water Resources'](#) Cal Waterfix project, also known as the twin tunnels, aimed to increase State Water Project reliability by building two 40-foot-diameter tunnels to move water under the Delta instead of through it.

Gov. Gavin Newsom signed an executive order in May rescinding permit applications and plans for the Cal Waterfix, and the state is now pursuing an alternative, single-tunnel project, [called Delta Conveyance](#).

The Department of Water Resources hasn't released a complete project description or estimated costs, but wants State Water Project members to opt in or out now, according to [Central Coast Water Authority](#) Executive Director Ray Stokes.

The [State Water Project provides 47 percent of Santa Barbara County's](#) average annual water supply, which is delivered and managed by the CCWA.

"The CCWA board voted not to participate in the Delta Conveyance project, which was expected, so we will be communicating that to DWR, and letting them know," he said Thursday after the meeting.

The [CCWA board](#) includes representatives from Santa Maria, Santa Barbara, Guadalupe, Buellton, the [Goleta Water District](#), the [Montecito Water District](#), the [Carpinteria Valley Water District](#) and the [Santa Ynez River Water Conservation District, ID1](#).

Board members did not want to participate in the project, mostly because of cost concerns, and did not want to impose the unknown expenses on the five nonvoting agencies in CCWA, Stokes noted.

Cost estimates so far have been based on the environmental analysis of the twin tunnels project, where a one-tunnel alternative had a \$14 billion construction cost and \$1 billion annual operating cost.

By opting in, CCWA members would be on the hook for the agency's share of the planning costs — \$3.8 million — but could have left before committing to operating costs.

The decision to opt out means member agencies could only participate in the Delta Conveyance project individually, by reaching agreements with other State Water Project contractors, Stokes noted. However, no agency representatives have mentioned a desire to opt in, he added.

Over time, because of issues including regulatory changes and climate change and seismic risk, DWR estimates that State Water Project reliability will decrease to 48 percent from its current 62 percent without a tunnel.

A tunnel project could improve reliability to 67 percent, according to the state.

CCWA is trying to re-acquire [suspended Table A water supplies](#), about 12,000 acre-feet per year for member agencies, which will boost the region's long-term reliability for much less money than the Delta Conveyance project, Stokes said.

The CCWA board voted last month to move forward with environmental analysis for that, he said.

"We were close to doing it a few years ago but then, number one, there was a concern that under Cal Waterfix, the twin tunnels, there was not an option to opt out, so there would be those costs on top of suspended Table A water costs and that would be too much money," Stokes said.

— [Noozhawk](#) managing editor Giana Magnoli can be reached at [. \(JavaScript must be enabled to view this email address\)](mailto:giana@noozhawk.com). Follow Noozhawk on Twitter: [@noozhawk](#), [@NoozhawkNews](#) and [@NoozhawkBiz](#). Connect with [Noozhawk on Facebook](#).