

More than money

The Times-Standard Eureka Times Standard

Posted: Times-Standard.com

The day may soon come when every citizen of Humboldt County can effortlessly tap into the wide world of information on the Internet and access, in a few quick gestures, vital information regarding government projects that have direct impact on their everyday lives.

But that day, sadly, isn't here yet.

And it is for that reason -- and not out of self-interest, although this paper receives a fee for printing the notices -- that the Times-Standard objects to Caltrans' plan to publish legal notices exclusively on its own website, abandoning its long-standing practice of posting these notices in trade journals and, yes, newspapers.

While advocates of the shift argue that dropping public notices in these venues will save the state \$700,000 a year, this is an issue that's bigger than money. This is about government accountability to the public. The truth of the matter is that more people will see Caltrans' business in trade journals and newspapers than on Caltrans' website. It is akin to the difference between handing you a rulebook on your first day of a new job, and posting the rules inside the supply closet.

Here in the remote wilds of Humboldt County, we hazard to guess that there are just as many people who depend on Caltrans to keep them connected to the outside world as there are those who demand Caltrans leave them unmolested behind the redwood curtain. Both camps deserve the facts of their government, not posted in relative shadow, but put out in broad daylight for all to see.

All too often, the only message deemed fit to communicate by the powers that be seems to be that open government isn't worth the cost. In the face of such an obvious error, we can only request a correction.