

Legislature approves \$344 million in UC, CSU seismic-safety projects

Erica Perez, California Watch, 6-3-10

Six seismic-safety-related construction projects in the UC and CSU systems have won funding approval from budget committees in both the Assembly and the Senate. If they're included in the final budget, the state would issue \$341 million in new lease revenue bonds and \$3 million in general obligation bonds approved by voters years ago to renovate or replace aging buildings.

The projects include Science I at CSU Stanislaus, Storm/Nasatir Halls at San Diego State University, the Spartan Complex at San Jose State University, the Center for Health Sciences South Tower at UCLA, the Davidson Library at UC Santa Barbara, and the Campbell Hall replacement at UC Berkeley.

That's only half of the 12 CSU and UC building projects that were proposed in the governor's budget. The Assembly budget subcommittee approved all 12, but the Senate Committee on Budget and Fiscal Review seemed to zero in on life-safety as a priority, rejecting the proposals that lacked that component.

Most of the buildings the committees supported are among the nearly 180 buildings in the UC and CSU systems that have been judged dangerous to occupy in a major quake, as we detailed in a story this spring. Both university systems have lists of buildings that have been evaluated by engineers as posing enough of a risk to warrant priority funding for seismic upgrades.

More than two dozen occupied CSU buildings and 10 UC buildings could collapse in a major quake and are considered the highest-risk structures on the campuses, but none of those are on the list approved by the legislative committees.

Rather, the buildings slated for renovations at CSU Stanislaus, San Jose State University, UCLA, UC Santa Barbara and UC Berkeley would pose danger to occupants because of falling hazards or other structural failures; they are not expected to collapse. The project to renovate San Diego State University's Storm and Nasatir Halls will include seismic upgrades but these buildings were not included on the CSU's list of risky buildings at all.

Meanwhile, the conference committee kicks off today to reconcile differences between the Assembly and Senate versions of the budget over the next several days. Advocates from the state's two university systems are pushing for all 12 of the bond-funded projects to win approval, officials said.

While the proposed projects wouldn't impact the general fund this year, the university systems are already carrying a significant amount of bond debt. In 2009-'10, the total general obligation bond payment is estimated at \$505 million, according to a report from the Senate subcommittee. University advocates will focus a big part of their push for additional bond-funded projects on the number of jobs the projects could create and the need for more room to accommodate students.

The UC system is particularly focused on persuading lawmakers to approve \$81 million in lease revenue bonds for a new science and engineering building at UC Merced, which has seen an enrollment increase of nearly 300 percent since its inaugural year, UC spokesman Steve Montiel said. Then again, the number of students enrolled at the university in Fall 2009 (3,414 students) was still tiny compared to the other undergraduate UC campuses.

At CSU Channel Islands, officials want to authorize \$2.4 million in general obligation bonds that were already approved by voters to add space in West Hall for lecture, laboratory and faculty offices. The initial funding would pay for design, with future construction costs to be paid for using lease revenue bonds.