

TO: Regional Transportation Commission
FROM: Linda Wilshusen, Executive Director
RE: Status Report on Highway 1 Projects

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Staff recommends that the Regional Transportation Commission accept this Status Report on activities related to the Highway 1 Project.

DISCUSSION

Highway 1/17 Merge Lanes Project

Final project design is near completion and Caltrans is updating cost estimates to reflect recent price increases in asphalt, concrete and steel. Right of Way funding for STIP projects has been cut until November and Caltrans has applied for an exception to complete right of way clearance on the project.

Meanwhile, the City of Santa Cruz is finalizing their review of the Traffic Management Plan and the Cooperative Agreement for the Public Awareness Campaign during the construction process. The intent of these documents is to identify strategic programs, detours routes, and public outreach efforts to minimize disruption to motorists, residents, businesses and emergency services during the construction process.

The Project Development Team next meets on November 9th to review the status of the project. Caltrans is planning to present an overview of the project at the December RTC meeting.

Morrissey Boulevard Interchange with Highway 1

Safe access for non-motorized users of local streets abutting the Morrissey Boulevard/Highway 1 Interchange is a long-standing community concern. Northbound traffic exiting Highway 1 does not stop before entering the neighborhood at the intersection with Rooney and Pacheco Streets. The speed of vehicle traffic exiting the highway, and roadway geometrics create poor visibility for motorists and non-motorists alike, making it difficult for non-motorists to safely cross the local streets. The closure of Branciforte Elementary School, south of the highway, and proximity of DeLaveaga Elementary School to the interchange, north of the highway, has heightened community concern for pedestrian and bicyclists safety.

The City of Santa Cruz and Caltrans, with support from Assemblyman Laird's office and RTC staff, have been meeting over the last few months to determine feasible short and long term improvements. To address the fundamental problem, City staff has proposed stopping northbound traffic exiting the highway with the installation of a stop sign or traffic signal. Caltrans has raised safety concerns with this proposal unless the ramp is widened to reduce potential ramp queuing back into the highway travel lanes. The cost of the ramp widening, as a stand alone project, is estimated at \$110,000, without the signal. Combining this work with the Highway 1/17 project may reduce the cost of this improvement, but delay the work.

Interim “traffic calming” actions are also under discussion (e.g. raised median islands within the City right-of-way, together with signage and striping) that would serve as a near term action to provide a safe zone for pedestrians and help to slow down traffic. The cost of this improvement is estimated at \$20,000 to \$30,000. This improvement is subject to approval by Caltrans who maintains access rights through the area. While the City could provide the signage and striping needed at this location, and City staff are preparing engineering plans for the raised median islands, no source of funds has been identified for constructing the median islands.

In the long term, the city staff recommend reconfiguring the Morrissey Boulevard Interchange as part of the Highway 1 HOV Lane Widening Project, or as a stand alone project. The Highway 1 Project Development Team will address the long term solution of this interchange as part of the proposals for recommending alternative design options for the PA/ED phase of the Highway 1 Project.

Highway 1 HOV Lane Widening Project – Project Approval/Environmental Documentation (PA/ED)

The Consultant team is currently working up options for selection of three additional alternatives for study through the PA/ED process. The purpose of analyzing an array of project alternatives is to determine the preferred method of improving Highway 1 between Morrissey Blvd. and San Andreas/Larkin Valley Road. By way of review, current project alternatives derived through the Project Study Report (PSR) prepared by Caltrans, include:

- 1 HOV Lane in each direction – full shoulder width standards
- 1 HOV Lane in each direction – reduced shoulder width standards
- Traffic System Management (TSM) with Auxiliary Lanes Alternative
- No Build Alternative

The existing scope of work provides for the consideration of up to three additional alternatives. The range of alternatives ultimately selected is intended to be responsive to agency and community input on design and operational aspects of the project consistent with the stated Purpose and Need adopted by the RTC. Once selected, the suite of project alternatives will be thoroughly evaluated in compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA) for the purpose of making a recommendation on the preferred method in the final environmental document.

As this is a critical milestone in the project development process, staff proposes presentations to the RTC at the November Transportation Planning Workshop on November 18th, and to the Highway 1 Construction Authority on December 3rd. The goal will be to arrive at a consensus, with public input, at the January 6th RTC meeting on the set of alternatives to be studied through the PA/ED phase.

Consistent with Nolte’s memo on the Highway 1 Pedestrian/Bicycle Crossings memo attached to the October RTC Highway 1 staff report, staff has scheduled a meeting with local agency representatives for November 18th. Having reviewed the pertinent local agency planning documents from the cities of Capitola, Santa Cruz, and the County along the Highway 1 corridor, the purpose of this meeting is to learn of any current or future sensitivities and/or concerns not reported in the planning documents before engaging the broader community in developing a recommendation on the appropriate locations for the future pedestrian/bicycle crossings. Future meetings will be scheduled with pedestrian and bicycle stakeholders and advocates, including the school districts and neighborhood community groups.

The Project Development Team for the Highway 1 HOV Lane Widening Project continues to meet monthly.

Highway 1 Construction Authority (HCA)

The next meeting of the HCA Board of Directors is scheduled for Friday, November 5th, to review the result of the November 2nd elections, progress in working with Caltrans on the Cooperative and Master Agreements necessary for the HCA to assume responsibility for the Highway 1 HOV Lane Widening Project, and discussions with the consultant team selected to provide administrative/project management services to the HCA.

SUMMARY

Caltrans has applied for an exemption on the freeze of Right of Way funding for STIP projects to complete right of way clearance on the Highway 1/17 Merge Lanes project. A meeting is scheduled with local agency staff on November 18th to begin the process to determine the best location for three pedestrian/bicycle crossings as part of the Highway 1 HOV Lane Widening Project. The HCA Board of Directors will meet on Friday, November 5th.

Prepared by: Kim Shultz

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