

REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

Transportation Policy Workshop

MINUTES

Thursday, November 18, 2004

9:00 am

SCCRTC Conference Room

Santa Cruz, CA 95060

Members Present: Jan Beautz Ellen Pirie
 Scott Kennedy Randy Johnson
 Marcela Tavantzis (Alt.) Dennis Norton
 Emily Reilly Edenilson Quintanilla (Alt.)
 Mike Keogh Mark Stone
 Andy Schiffrin (Alt.) Dave Murray (ex-officio) (Alt.)

Members Absent: Richard De La Paz

Staff Present: Linda Wilshusen Pat Dellin
 Tegan Speiser Karena Pushnik
 Kim Shultz Gini Pineda

Commission Vice-Chair Randy Johnson called the meeting to order.

1. Introductions

Introductions were made.

2. Oral Communications

Mike Dalbey said that when staff compiles its study regarding other transportation sales tax measures on ballots throughout the state, it will show that transit projects were important elements of the successful measures. He said that nationwide 24 of 30 transportation sales tax measures passed all of which involved significant transit components, especially rail projects. He said that mass transit was becoming a part of the conservative political agenda and passed out an article from a conservative website hosted by Paul Weyrich.

Mark Greenfield said he had traveled on the Coast Daylight train from Los Angeles to San Luis Obispo and that it was very enjoyable. He said that Amtrak wanted to thank the Commission for its support.

3. Additions/Deletions to the Agenda - None

CONSENT AGENDA (Quintanilla/Reilly)

4. Minutes of September 16, 2004 TPW Meeting

REGULAR AGENDA

5. Highway 1 Widening HOV Lane Project: Process to Select Alternatives for the Project Approval/Environmental Document (PA/ED)

Deputy Director Pat Dellin gave an overview of the proposed steps and process to select alternatives for the Project Approval/Environmental Document (PA/ED). She said it was time for the Commission to choose the additional alternatives to be considered in the Environmental Review and to determine a time for a public hearing.

Chris Metzger, Nolte Associates, made a presentation on the four alternatives already considered in the PA/ED. He explained that these alternatives and the additional alternatives under discussion needed to conform to the purpose and need of the project as approved by the Commission in January 2004.

The four alternatives already included are: the no-build alternative, which would only allow for projects already funded and that stand alone from the widening project; the Transportation Systems Management alternative, which would include auxiliary lanes, ramp metering and electronic monitoring/notification systems; a six lane HOV lane widening project built to Caltrans' maximum design standards; and a six lane HOV lane widening project with reduced shoulder widths.

Mr. Metzger explained options for the three other alternatives to be considered in the Environmental Review. He illustrated the Diamond Interchange Configurations alternative which would change the configurations of interchanges in several locations, including Morrissey Boulevard, Soquel Avenue and State Park Drive. One feature in favor of this alternative is that the reduced footprint of the interchanges could provide space for park and ride lots. This plan would reconfigure the interchanges at 41st Avenue and Bay/Porter Streets into one integrated interchange system utilizing two-lane, one-way frontage roads on each side of the freeway with single off and on ramps in each direction. Mr. Metzger said that diamond interchange configurations are often preferred for bicyclists and pedestrians as they eliminate high speed free flowing ramps.

Commission Alternate Tavantzis asked if this alternative was in addition to the widening and Mr. Metzger said that it was. Pat Gelb, Parsons, said that it might be more accurate to describe this option as a part of the fourth alternative rather than as a stand alone alternative.

Commissioner Keogh asked how this type of configuration would impact signal traffic at 41st Avenue. Mr. Metzger said that there will be some level of service deterioration and that this

is the biggest concern regarding this configuration. If this alternative is chosen, the traffic impacts will be assessed as part of the Environmental Impact Report.

Commissioner Norton and Commissioner Beautz agreed that most people use the auxiliary lane between 41st Avenue and Bay as a freeway lane in order to avoid having to travel on local streets between Capitola and Soquel.

Commissioner Reilly asked if some of the suggested improvements could be made while keeping the actual highway to four lanes.

Mr. Metzger said that the TSM alternative would basically keep the highway at four lanes and that some additional alternatives could be worked into that alternative. He said that the Commission had some leeway in picking and choosing alternatives and could come up with a hybrid alternative.

Mr. Metzger went on to describe the second option: Improved Transit Access. This alternative would assess opportunities to provide improved transit access to and from the HOV lanes for buses, either by direct ramps from the HOV lanes to local streets and/or by bus stops along side the freeway, outside of the freeway lanes. This option is designed to reduce the time it takes a bus to enter or leave the freeway.

Commission Alternate Schiffirin asked if the cost of this option was greater than the basic project. Mr. Metzger said yes, and affirmed that this would not be a substitute for the widening, but a high end add-on.

Commissioners discussed the practicality of this option, noting that routing people from freeway bus service to other bus routes would have to be coordinated and that a bus system that was more advanced than the current system and with added bus service would most likely be necessary to make this option workable.

Commissioner Reilly asked if the TSM was correlated with traffic demand management.

Mr. Metzger said not directly and that TSM uses available tools and puts them on the system and assesses how the overall transportation system would react to the improvements, modifying the improvements in accordance with the reaction. Senior Planner Kim Shultz said that within the traffic operation analysis it is possible to go into the model and change the vehicle occupancy, particularly with regards to carpooling, or factor in flexible work hours.

Pat Gelb asked if a transit marketing analysis was being done, saying that it would help determine ridership demands.

Commission Alternate Schiffirin raised the issue of whether the improved transit access options were really alternatives or just enhancements to the original widening plan, saying that a transit only alternative would be a true alternative. After discussion it was noted that under CEQA, alternatives should not have greater environmental impacts than the basic plan.

Commissioner Beautz said that she disagreed that this was merely an enhancement and pointed out that increased bus ridership would qualify this alternative under CEQA.

Mr. Metzger said that the other element of the transit focus is to make bus stops part of the interchange system using a slip ramp which is within the footprint of the freeway.

About the overall widening projects, Commissioner Beautz noted there were fewer impacts at the southern end of the project with the exception of the area in Aptos where there are two railroad structures.

Cliff Walters, Santa Cruz Big Trees Railroad, asked about service interruption when replacing railroad bridges. Mr. Metzger said that this was a big issue and would probably entail shutting bridges down while the actual construction took place and using trucks to move the freight during that time.

Commissioner Beautz made a motion, seconded by Commission Alternate Quintanilla, to accept the staff recommendations that the Regional Transportation Commission:

1. Receive an oral report from the PA/ED consultants on the proposed set of alternatives for the Project Approval/ Environmental Document (PA/ED) for the Highway 1 Widening/HOV Lane project and how the project selected at the end of the PA/ED could include elements of different alternatives studied in the PA/ED;
2. Provide preliminary comments and direction on the proposed set of PA/ED alternatives;
3. Approve the proposed process to select the PA/ED alternatives;
4. Schedule an evening public hearing in January to receive community input on the PA/ED alternatives;
5. Direct staff to publicize the alternatives and the public hearing to the media, individuals and groups;
6. Accept a report on the status of other activities related to Highway 1 projects

Commissioners discussed improved transit access options and agreed that using a center ramp should probably not be pursued. After further discussion it was decided to re-name the TSM option to "Ramp Metering and Auxiliary Lanes" to be clarify the alternative.

Commissioner Reilly asked if queue jumping for busses and carpools on ramps will be included in the TSM alternative and the answer was yes.

Commissioner Pirie said she hears continuing interest in her district about four lanes in each direction, one being an HOV lane and one a mixed use lane. Mr. Metzger said that the eight lane facility is not a recommended alternative as it does not meet the project's purpose and need as approved by the Commission. It would also have much broader environmental impacts than the six lane plan, and would require extensive right-of-way acquisition and the replacement of every structure crossing the freeway.

Mr. Metzger also discussed two other options that he does not recommend the RTC pursue: single point (urban) interchanges and braided ramps near 41st Avenue/Bay Street. He said

that single point interchanges work well when there is equal traffic in each direction but that they are not considered bike and pedestrian “friendly” and have significant aesthetic impacts that are not in keeping with the style defining Santa Cruz County. Regarding braided ramps, Mr. Metzger said that this would entail an additional level of structure and no cross town movement.

Commissioner Johnson restated the motion to approve the staff recommendations and move forward with the Public Hearing. Commission Alternate Schiffirin clarified that the motion included the changes that were made to the alternative descriptions as a result of Commission discussion.

The motion, as amended, passed unanimously.

Based on Commissioner input, Commission staff will investigate holding the public hearing on the evening of January 20th, in the County Board of Supervisors Chambers, if available.

The Open Session adjourned at 10:50 a.m.

CLOSED SESSION

6. Conference with Real Property Negotiator for Acquisition of the Santa Cruz Branch Rail Line Property: Santa Cruz Branch Rail Line from Watsonville Junction to Davenport
 - Agency Negotiator: Kirk Trost, Miller, Owen & Trost
 - Negotiation Parties: SCCRTC, Union Pacific
 - Under Negotiation: Price and Terms

OPEN SESSION

7. Next Meetings / Adjournment

The next regular RTC meeting will be held Thursday, December 2, 2004 at 9:00 a.m. at the Board of Supervisors Chambers, 701 Ocean Street, Santa Cruz, CA.

The next Transportation Policy Workshop will be held Thursday, December 16, 2004 at 9:00 a.m. at the RTC Office, 1523 Pacific Avenue, Santa Cruz, CA.

Respectfully submitted,

Gini Pineda, Staff

ATTENDEES

<u>Name</u>	<u>Representing</u>
Robert Yount	
Les White	SCMTD
Genevieve Bookwalter	Santa Cruz <i>Sentinel</i>
Mike Dalbey	FORT
Paul Elerick	CFST
Cliff Walters	Santa Cruz Big Trees Railroad
Rahn Garcia	County Counsel
Mark Greenfield	
Jason Butler	CHP
Donna Ziel	
Bob Scott	SCCRTC Technical Advisor