

**AGENDA:** January 20, 2005

**TO:** Regional Transportation Commission

**FROM:** Pat Dellin, Acting Executive Director

**RE:** Highway 1 Widening/HOV Lane Project: Public Hearing to Select Project Alternatives for the Project Approval/Environmental Document (PA/ED)

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## **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

Staff recommends that the Regional Transportation Commission:

1. Receive an oral report from the PA/ED consultants on the recommended set of alternatives for the Project Approval/Environmental Document (PAED) for the Highway 1 Widening/HOV Lane Project ([Attachment 1](#));
  2. Receive written comments submitted to the RTC prior to the Public Hearing regarding the selection of project alternatives ([Attachment 2](#));
  3. Hold a Public Hearing to receive input on the selection of project alternatives to be studied through the PA/ED process;
  4. Select a set of seven project alternatives to move forward in the PA/ED process;
  5. Reaffirm that two other potential alternatives (an eight-lane facility and a six-lane, mixed-flow facility) are not to be pursued; and
  6. Submit the selected set of project alternatives to Caltrans and request their approval in writing.
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## **DISCUSSION**

Chris Metzger, Project Manager-Nolte Associates, and Pat Gelb, Environmental Manager-Parsons Transportation Group, will present an overview of the proposed set of project alternatives for the Highway 1 Widening/HOV Lane, Project Approval/Environmental Documentation (PA/ED) process.

The project consultants have updated the Project Alternatives memo ([Attachment 1](#)) based on input provided at the November 2004 TPW meeting

Staff and the consultants seek the Commission's approval on a set of alternatives to be developed and studied through the environmental process in order to maintain the current schedule for completion of the Environmental Document.

By way of review, the project consultants worked with staff and the Project Development Team (PDT) over the course of the last several months to develop the initial list of project alternatives. Per the original scope of services and contract budget, up to seven (7) alternatives can be considered as part of the environmental document. Four alternatives were identified at the time the project was initiated based on the Caltrans Project Study Report and were included in the consultant contract scope of work. These alternatives are listed below and discussed in greater detail in [Attachment 1](#).

### **Proposed Alternative 1:**

**No Build Alternative** – The No-Build Alternative offers a basis for comparison with the build alternatives in the future analysis year of 2030. This alternative assumes no major construction on Highway 1 through the project limits other than programmed improvements and continued maintenance. Programmed projects include the Highway 1/17 Merge Lane project and the installation of a median barrier on Highway 1 between Freedom Boulevard and Rio Del Mar Boulevard.

### **Proposed Alternative 2:**

**Traffic System Management (TSM) with Auxiliary Lanes (\$100M)** – This alternative is a relatively low-cost strategy to improve highway operations within the project limits without continuous widening. It consists of ramp-metering, auxiliary lanes, electronic monitoring, and notification systems. The cost estimate provided above is based on locations identified in the Caltrans Project Study Report (see pages 2 & 3 of Attachment 1). Other locations will be considered based on further analysis.

### **Proposed Alternative 3:**

**One HOV Lane in each direction (\$390M)** -- This alternative maintains Caltrans design standards to the maximum extent reasonable. Where the existing median width is less than the standard, 13.8 meters, the roadway would be re-striped to provide the standard shoulder and the HOV lane, and highway would be widened at the outside shoulder. Retaining walls would be constructed at the most effective and visually appropriate locations to minimize right-of-way acquisition and separate frontage roads from the highway.

### **Proposed Alternative 4:**

**One HOV Lane in each direction (\$300M - \$350M)** -- The focus of this alternative is to identify and assess opportunities to reduce impacts associated with Alternative 3 through the use of obtainable and justifiable design exceptions, without unacceptable impacts to operations or safety. This alternative would enable the addition of the HOV lane with reduced highway widening and would require fewer retaining walls and/or fewer structure replacements and/or less right-of-way and environmental impacts because the existing roadway cross-section would more nearly accommodate the proposed cross-section.

### **Other Alternatives**

The consultant scope of work provides for up to three (3) additional alternatives to be carried through the PA/ED. Potential options for the three remaining alternatives were developed within the framework of the approved Purpose and Need for the project (see Attachment 1, page 1), and in consideration of input received at the Community Information meetings in April 2004.

For the three additional alternatives, it is important to note any alternative that would enlarge the Area of Potential Effect (APE) for environmental analysis, currently defined using the largest footprint of the full standard HOV Lane alternative (Proposed Alternative 3), would have budget and schedule implications for the PA/ED.

Various options for the additional alternatives were initially presented to the RTC in November 2004. Based on direction at that time, the consultants have eliminated the option for direct ramp to/from HOV lanes from their recommendation. The consultants and staff, propose the following

three options for the final three alternatives for the PA/ED. The remaining three proposed alternatives are discussed briefly below and in more detail in [Attachment 1](#).

**Proposed Alternative 5: Diamond Interchange Configuration** This alternative offers an alternative design configuration for selected interchanges along the corridor in order to potentially reduce right-of-way and environmental impacts. The diamond interchange design is generally preferred by bicyclists and pedestrians as it eliminates high speed free-flowing ramp operations found at many existing interchanges. A variation of this design is also included for the 41<sup>st</sup> Avenue-Bay Avenue/Porter Street interchange complex as a single interchange system utilizing one-way frontage roads (see [Attachment 1](#)). Project costs for this alternative are anticipated to be similar to Alternatives 3 and 4 above, depending on shoulder width.

**Proposed Alternative 6: Improved Transit Access** This alternative would analyze opportunities to provide improved transit access to/from the HOV lanes, primarily for buses. Two preliminary options to be considered for this alternative include direct ramps from the HOV lanes to the local streets, and bus access or stops on the freeway outside of the freeway mainline using the on/off ramps. The goal of this alternative is to increase the effectiveness of buses using the HOV lanes by reducing the time it takes a bus to leave the freeway to load and unload passengers. This alternative has the potential to increase the environmental APE), but variations may be able to be developed within the APE. Project costs for this alternative will be similar to or slightly higher, \$10M to \$20M higher, than alternatives 3 and 4 above.

**Proposed Alternative 7 – Undefined Hybrid** The final proposed alternative is undefined at this time. This alternative could be used to develop a hybrid project that would incorporate elements of other alternatives analyzed through the course of the environmental study.

#### Alternatives Considered, but Not Recommended

Two other concepts that have been discussed but are not recommended for inclusion in the selected set of project alternatives are construction of an eight (8) lane facility and widening to provide six (6) mixed flow lanes (no HOV lanes). These options were not supported by the Commission at previous meetings and are not recommended to be added at this time for several reasons. First, these two options have received very little public support at previous commission meetings, through written communications from the public or at community input meetings. Second, neither option meets the project goals as set forth in the Purpose and Need Statement (see [Attachment 1](#), page 1) as well as the proposed alternatives. Finally, the eight-lane option would probably have greater right-of-way needs and therefore greater environmental impacts and higher cost than the recommended alternatives.

#### Transit Market Analysis

As part of the alternatives evaluation process, the consultants propose to conduct a Transit Market Analysis to aid in the assessment of the alternatives in meeting the stated purpose and need of the project. This analysis, to be coordinated with Transit District staff, includes an investigation of the potential size of the transit market based on literature surveys and information from the Santa Cruz Metropolitan Transit District. Consideration will be given to options and enhancements to attract more transit users and the effectiveness of the selected Highway 1 Widening/HOV Lane project alternatives in supporting and enhancing the transit system.

### Public Comments Received to Date

To encourage active participation at the public hearing, staff sent out nearly 1,000 announcements of the public hearing and placed advertisements in local newspapers. The Project Alternatives memo was posted on the RTC website and referenced in the announcements inviting public participation in the project alternatives selection. Attachment 2 is a compendium of written comments received as of this writing. Additional written comments received after this date will be provided at the meeting.

### Request for Concurrence from Caltrans

While the RTC serves as the “responsible” agency in the conduct of the PA/ED process, Caltrans retains the role of “lead agency” for the environmental process, pursuant to CEQA requirements. Accordingly, staff recommends that the RTC submit your chosen set of alternatives to Caltrans and request their written approval.

### **SUMMARY**

It is time for the Commission to select the seven project alternatives to be carried through the conclusion of the PA/ED. Seven alternatives are recommended in the Project Alternatives memo (Attachment 1) which has been updated based on input provided at the November 2004 TPW meeting. Two other options are recommended to be officially set aside. Project consultants will provide an overview of the recommended set of seven alternatives prior to the public hearing.

### Attachments:

1. Project Alternatives memo, revised December 2004, by Nolte Associates
2. Pubic Comments received to date as of January 10, 2005.

Prepared by: Kim Shultz

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