

AGENDA: February 3, 2005

TO: Regional Transportation Commission
FROM: Pat Dellin, Acting Executive Director
RE: Highway 1/17 Interchange Merge Lanes Project

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the Regional Transportation Commission:

1. Hear an update on the Highway 1/17 Interchange Merge Lanes project presented by Caltrans District 5 representatives; and
 2. Provide input on the preferred aesthetic treatment for the 500 ft non-landscaped soundwall section between Branciforte and Carbonera Creeks.
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BACKGROUND

In June 2003, Caltrans provided a presentation on the aesthetic designs for the Highway 1/17 Interchange Merge Lanes project soundwalls, retaining walls, overpasses and underpasses. In October 2003, Caltrans provided extensive information about the tree removal/re-landscaping plan, noise attenuation strategies, and the aesthetics on the 500 ft non-landscaped soundwall section between Branciforte and Carbonera Creeks.

A Highway 1/17 Project Development Team (PDT) meets regularly to work out the details of the project including: project design, aesthetic treatments, right-of-way acquisition, utility relocation, maintenance, landscaping, building material options, public awareness program, traffic management information and coordination with bicyclists and pedestrians on overcrossings. At the last RTC meeting, a Commissioner requested that Caltrans provide information about alternative building materials that might be more ecologically sound or less expensive than traditional materials.

DISCUSSION

The Caltrans project manager for the Highway 1/17 Merge Lanes project, Luis Duazo, and Caltrans designer Michael Lim will present information on the following items at the RTC meeting:

- Funding update
- Schedule
- Public Awareness Campaign
- Landscaping
- Aesthetic treatment for the non-landscaped soundwall segment
- Design features including alternative construction materials considered

- ❑ Construction staging
- ❑ Bicycle and pedestrian issues

Funding and Project Schedule

Start of construction for this project continues to be jeopardized by the limited availability of state funds. The Governor's proposed budget continues to borrow transportation funds to balance the state's general fund. However, due to delays in other projects around the state or the settlement of Indian gaming law suits, there may be some State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) funding released this year. This project is in a good competitive position for an allocation of STIP funds from the California Transportation Commission for the following reasons:

- The project has been in line for funds since the project was programmed in 1990
- The project is a safety project addressing an area over the statewide average for accidents
- The CTC considers this project capacity increasing through the additional merging lanes
- The route is on a state highway
- The project's design and right-of-way clearance are well advanced

For this project to have any chance of receiving scarce state funds, it must be ready to go to construction. For this reason, staff and Caltrans have been working diligently to push completion of final design and certification of the completion of right-of-way work for submittal of an Allocation Request in June. Final design for the Highway 1/17 Interchange Merge Lanes project is more than 95% complete. The earliest construction start date is now December 2005. Staff will continue to keep the Commission informed of funding developments.

Aesthetic Treatment for Non-Landscaped Sound Wall Segment

As discussed at previous meetings (June and October 2003) there is a 500-foot section between Carbonera and Branciforte Creeks where the right-of way is too narrow for landscaping on or in front of the soundwall. A wave pattern (breaking in the direction of traffic) was proposed for this section. A Commissioner requested that Caltrans investigate alternate designs. These will be presented at the meeting. Staff and Caltrans recommend that, due to the project schedule, the RTC make a decision on the preferred aesthetic design for this segment at this meeting.

Inclusion of Pedestrian Amenities at Morrissey Boulevard

Recently added to the final design are plans to improve pedestrian circulation on the north (mountain) side of the Morrissey Boulevard interchange to improve access for De Laveaga Elementary School children. The design includes a new stop sign, crosswalks and a widened off ramp to allow additional vehicle capacity and avoid interference onto the highway. Caltrans has been extremely responsive to the City of Santa Cruz's request to include these new features into the design in these final stages.

If the Highway 1/17 project does not receive funds in this fiscal year and the City of Santa Cruz desires to pursue the project sooner to expedite improvements, Caltrans has indicated that they are willing to contribute toward the costs, but would not be the project lead. A letter from Caltrans to the City is attached ([Attachment 1](#)).

Staff will continue to work with Caltrans and City staff on this issue and keep the Commission informed of developments.

SUMMARY

Caltrans will present information about the Highway 1/17 Interchange Merge Lanes project including information requested at previous meetings by Commissioners. Staff and Caltrans recommend that the Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission indicate their support for the aesthetic treatments for the 500 foot non-landscaped sound wall section.

Attachment 1: 1/5/05 Letter from Caltrans to the City of Santa Cruz

Prepared by: Karena Pushnik

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