

**TO:** Regional Transportation Commission  
**FROM:** Kim Shultz, Senior Transportation Planner  
**RE:** Highway 1 Soquel/Morrissey Merge Lanes Project

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## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Staff recommends that the Regional Transportation Commission:

1. Approve submitting a federal earmark request in the amount of \$9.85 million for the proposed Highway 1 Soquel/Morrissey Merge Lanes Project;
  2. Approve adding the Highway 1 Soquel/Morrissey Merge Lanes Project as two phases in the constrained list of projects in the *Draft 2005 Regional Transportation Plan*;
  3. Direct the Highway 1 PA/ED consultants to pursue environmental review of the project; and,
  4. If the federal earmark is approved, direct staff to return with recommendations to complete the funding package for this project.
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## **DISCUSSION**

On January 6<sup>th</sup>, the RTC approved resubmitting a request for a federal earmark for the Highway 1 Widening/HOV Lane Project. This action was consistent with the need to reintroduce legislation for the reauthorization of the Transportation Equity Act for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (TEA 21) in the new Congressional session. The federal bill adopted by the House last year, but not acted upon by the full Congress, included a \$3.67 million earmark for the Highway 1 project sponsored by Congressman Farr. Congress will now be addressing TEA 21 with a clean slate and without commitment to the earmarks included in the prior bill. Earmark requests have to be submitted to the Congress by February 7<sup>th</sup>.

During the week of January 10<sup>th</sup>, the SCCRTC Executive Director and the RTC's Washington Assistant, Carolyn Chaney, met with various congressional staff members in Washington D.C. to discuss the federal earmark request. Due to Federal budget constraints and the expectation that the TEA-21 reauthorization bill will be no larger, possibly smaller, than last year's House bill of \$284 billion for six years, a smaller, discrete project on Highway 1 should be considered. The project would more likely be considered and supported if it is affordable as well as effective, could be funded and delivered in the general timeframe of the federal reauthorization bill (typically six years), and if it would help commercial and emergency traffic as well as bus and car traffic.

Staff consulted with Caltrans and Nolte Associates engineers and environmental leads to develop a proposal for the Highway 1 Soquel/Morrissey Merge Lanes Project. The proposed project was generally well received by Congressional staff.

### Project Description and Benefits

Staff and consultants have prepared the attached project information sheet (Attachment 1), cost estimate (Attachment 2) and map (Attachment 3, enclosed separately). The project involves construction of auxiliary lanes between the Soquel Drive and Morrissey Boulevard interchanges in both the northbound and southbound directions. The project would not make substantive changes to the interchanges themselves.

This project is the next increment of improvement to the Highway 1 corridor, following the Highway 1/17 Merge Lanes Project. Caltrans traffic engineers have identified this project as the most important small-scale improvement that can be made to the Highway 1 freeway to improve traffic flow and safety.

Based on traffic modeling and analysis efforts prepared by Caltrans, the auxiliary lanes would significantly reduce traffic delay by reducing weaving and merging conflicts in the area and therefore be expected to provide safety benefits as well. The southbound auxiliary lane is projected to reduce delay by 266,000 hours per year, and the northbound auxiliary lane is expected to reduce delay by 315,000 hours per year. Due to the substantial operational benefits of the proposed auxiliary lanes, Caltrans engineers expect an improvement in traffic flow will be realized though the entire corridor.

As shown on the Project Map (Attachment 3, enclosed separately), the Highway 1 project engineers have determined that the north and southbound auxiliary lanes (shown in red on the map), and replacement of the La Fonda overcrossing (shown in orange) could be constructed within Caltrans' existing right-of-way. The project map also shows the extent of the Highway 1/17 Merge Lane project in this area (shown in yellow on the map), and the location of soundwalls to be constructed by Caltrans as part of the Highway 1/17 project. The Highway 1 Soquel/Morrissey Merge Lanes Project could include further soundwalls, to be determined following environmental review.

The Highway 1 Soquel/Morrissey Merge Lanes Project is proposed to be a stand-alone project that would complement, but not delay or otherwise jeopardize progress on construction of the Highway 1/17 Merge Lanes Project. As previously discussed, the current goal is to complete the Plans, Specifications and Estimates (PS&E) on the Highway 1/17 Merge Lanes Project in the next few months so as to better compete for limited state funding. The Highway 1 Soquel/Morrissey Merge Lanes Project would also not jeopardize planning for the Highway 1 Widening/HOV Lane project.

Depending on when funding and the PS & E package could be completed for the Soquel/Morrissey Merge Lanes Project, the intent would be to coordinate implementation with the Highway 1/17 Merge Lanes Project to the maximum extent possible.

## Costs and Funding

The total cost for the project is estimated at \$12.3 million, including final design and construction support. While environmental review would be for the entire project, staff proposes to split the projects into two phases, if necessary, for funding or for construction purposes. Phase 1 is proposed to include the replacement of the La Fonda Overcrossing and construction of the southbound auxiliary lane, at an estimated cost of \$8.4 million. Phase 2, construction of the northbound auxiliary lane, is estimated to cost \$3.9 million.

Federal earmarks require a 20% local match. Therefore, staff recommends requesting 80% of the estimated costs, \$9.85 million, for this project. If an earmark is approved at a significantly lower amount, the Commission could consider only pursuing Phase 1 of the project. The 80% share of Phase 1 is \$6.72 million.

If the earmark is approved, the Commission will need to program the remainder of the funding. The 20% local share for Phase 1 is \$1.7 million and for Phase 2, \$800,000. However, the federal earmark may provide less than 80% of the funding, and the RTC would need to program the remainder.

If the federal earmark is approved, staff will return with recommendations to complete the funding package for this project. In a normal, two-year State Transportation Improvement Plan (STIP) cycle, the Commission receives approximately \$20 million in new funds. Given the continuing trend of the state redirecting funds from the STIP to cover non-transportation programs in the General Fund, it is unlikely that the statewide 2006 STIP will include significant amounts of new funds. Never the less, the Commission is owed \$10 million from the last STIP cycle that the CTC did not allow the Commission to program which might be available in the 2006 STIP. Staff would look into all possible funding sources and return with recommendations.

## Environmental Review

The scope of services and budget for the Highway 1 Widening/HOV Lane Project PA/ED consultant contract includes work and costs to complete environmental studies on a limited number of "independent utility" projects such as auxiliary lane projects that would qualify for Categorical Exemptions under CEQA. The environmental consultants for the Highway 1 PA/ED are reviewing resource information, but preliminary estimates are that environmental documentation could be completed within 9 months.

## Inclusion in *Regional Transportation Plan*

To satisfy environmental requirements and receive a federal earmark, the project must be included in the constrained element of the *Regional Transportation Plan (RTP)*. As the proposed project will accommodate room for HOV lanes in the future, staff proposes to subtract the funds needed for this project from the funds designated for the HOV Lane project to meet the constrained funding requirement in the *RTP*.

Accordingly, in conjunction with approving the submittal of the Highway 1 Soquel/Morrissey Merge Lanes Project for a federal earmark, staff recommends adding the Highway 1 Soquel

Drive to Morrissey Boulevard Merge Lanes Project as a two phased effort to the constrained list of funded projects in the *Draft 2005 RTP*. The *Draft RTP* will be released to the Commission and the public in mid-February.

## **SUMMARY**

Staff has received feedback from the RTC's Washington Assistant and congressional staff that the RTC's federal earmark request would have a greater likelihood of success if it were a smaller-scale, deliverable project that would address congestion for all highway users. Staff recommends submitting the Highway 1 Soquel/Morrissey Merge Lanes Project for an earmark of federal funds in the reauthorization of TEA 21, and adding the Highway 1 Soquel/Morrissey Merge Lanes Project to the *Draft 2005 Regional Transportation Plan*. Also, staff recommends that the environmental review be initiated. Finally, if the federal earmark is approved, staff will return with recommendations to complete the funding package for this project

### Attachments:

1. Project Information Sheet for the Highway 1 Soquel/Morrissey Merge Lanes Project
2. Preliminary Cost Estimate
3. Project Map (Enclosed Separately)

Prepared by: Kim Shultz

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