

February 7, 2005

Bobi Lyon-Ritter
Central Region Environmental Analysis
California Department of Transportation
2015 East Shields Avenue, Suite 100
Fresno, CA 93726

RE: Initial Study for the Laurel Curve Safety Improvements

Dear Mr. Lyon-Ritter:

Thank for the opportunity to comment on the Initial Study for the Laurel Curve Safety Improvement Project. The Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission (SCCRTC) serves as the Regional Transportation Planning Agency (RTPA) for Santa Cruz County. This project supports one of the SCCRTC's goals of preserving and maintaining the existing transportation system, emphasizing safety and efficiency. In addition, Highway 17 is a vital link between Santa Cruz County and the San Francisco Bay region and the SCCRTC supports safety improvements to the highway.

As a safety project, the future use of Intelligent Transportation System (ITS) components at the proposed project site should be considered. ITS components can provide detection and verification of conditions and broadcasting of correct and timely information to motorists. As motorists are better informed of adverse conditions on the highway, they can take appropriate action to proceed cautiously or avoid the area. Some ITS components are already located along the Highway 17 corridor and help to provide for safer and more efficient travel.

The proposed project will reduce collisions at the proposed location; however, collisions will probably still occur due to the left turn movements in and out of the highway. Closed Circuit TV Cameras and Magnetic Loop Traffic Monitoring Stations linked to the Traffic Management Center (TMC) are safety improvements that can help to detect, verify, and more efficiently and effectively manage any future collisions and avoid secondary collisions. Staff requests that you work with the Traffic Operation System (TOS) Oversight Committee of the SCCRTC to determine which TOS components, if any, would improve safety in the proposed project site and what design features should be considered in the proposed project to

facilitate

these future TOS components.

If possible, the SCCRTC would like to be informed of the Traffic Management Plan developed to minimize construction effects on local traffic circulation. The SCCRTC may be able to provide additional input regarding local traffic issues affecting this area. For example, the SCCRTC is working closely with Caltrans and the City of Santa Cruz on the Highway 17 Merge Lanes Project and it will be important to take into consideration the timing and phasing of these two projects. The public contacts the SCCRTC regarding all types of regional transportation projects and it would be helpful if the SCCRTC was aware of the proposed project time line. Staff suggests that the traffic management plan be developed in coordination with Caltrans District 4 and include the use of the existing changeable message signs and highway advisory radio along Highways 1 and 17 to inform motorists of construction activities. In addition, due to the volume of traffic during the day for regular commuting and during the weekends for tourist travel, staff suggests that all construction work be done during the night.

Staff would like to ask that Section 1.2.2 include that the Office of Traffic Safety grant included establishing the Safe on 17 Task Force, which includes representatives from two Caltrans districts, two CHP offices, two RTPA regions, the media and emergency service providers. Staff would also like to ask that you update *Chapter 3 Comments and Coordination* to show that the Project Manager reported the status of the proposed project at the quarterly meetings of the TOS Oversight Committee of the Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission. In addition, staff would like to ask that you correct the Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission Bicycle Planning and Programs “Trails map” to read “Bikeways map” in *Appendix D References* section.

As a result of a previous improvement project at this location there is now a 3 to 4 inch edge in the middle of a turnout. The turnout is in the northbound direction just north of Laurel Road. Staff recommends that this be corrected to ensure that the turnout is at one consistent level throughout.

There are at least 2 and possibly up to 4 call boxes in the project area. Staff recommends that Caltrans coordinate with Grace Blakeslee (831-460-3219) to have the any call boxes within the project footprint temporarily removed prior to the beginning of construction and avoid any damage to the call boxes.

Thank you very much for your consideration of these comments.

Sincerely,

Pat Dellin
Acting Executive Director

cc: SCCRTC, TOS Committee, District 5
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