

AGENDA: June 2, 2005

TO: Regional Transportation Commission
FROM: Kim Shultz, Senior Transportation Planner
REGARDING: Status Report on Related Highway 1 Projects

RECOMMENDATIONS

This item is for information only.

BACKGROUND

The Highway 1 Construction Authority (HCA) was created in February 2004 to manage the implementation of the Highway 1 Widening/HOV Lane Project. In January 2005, the HCA decided that the RTC should retain management of the Highway 1 Project and the HCA would continue to meet on a quarterly basis staffed by the County Public Works Agency. In January 2005, the RTC recommended a list of alternatives, subsequently approved by Caltrans, for development through the preliminary design/environmental review phase of the project referred to as Project Approval/Environmental Documentation (PA/ED) phase.

The Highway 1/17 Merge Lanes Project is managed by Caltrans District-5, located in San Luis Obispo. The environmental document for the Highway 1/17 Merge Lanes Project was approved in August 2002 and the final design element (the soundwall) was approved in March 2005. The start of construction is subject to the availability of state transportation funds.

Thanks to Congressman Farr, the House version of the transportation reauthorization bill includes \$3.67 million for the Highway 1 Soquel/Morrissey Merge Lane Project.

DISCUSSION

Highway 1/ 17 Merge Lanes Project

Caltrans has reported that last minute utility relocation issues with PG&E have delayed right-of-way certification of the project. This may delay previous efforts to have the project "ready to list" in July 2005 to better compete for limited state funding that may become available later this year. Caltrans staff are looking for opportunities to expedite this process and any additional information will be given orally at the meeting.

Meanwhile the design plans have been submitted to Caltrans Contract Unit for preparation of bid packages. This process includes a detailed review of the design, constructability, and the project's compliance with the environmental document.

Caltrans is also finalizing the Cooperative Agreement for the project's public awareness campaign, and the City of Santa Cruz has asked that additional improvements for bicycle and pedestrian circulation be included in the project.

HOV Lane Widening Project – Project Approval/Environmental Documentation (PA/ED)

With receipt of the AMBAG Travel Demand Model and selection of the project alternatives, the Hwy 1 consultant team has reviewed the project schedule and has reaffirmed a target date for completion of the environmental process in early Spring 2008. At this time, critical path elements include the traffic analysis work and cultural resources, specifically the completion of archaeological site investigations.

Work on the traffic analysis has been enhanced with the active participation of AMBAG staff and their modeling consultant in Project Development Team meetings to help identify and resolve issues in a timely manner.

The methodology for the archaeological site work is currently under review by Caltrans representatives to insure compliance with regulations of the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO). Prior to the actual excavation work meetings will be held with local representatives of the Ohlone and Costanoan tribes. Meanwhile, Nolte's right-of-way sub-consultant is in discussion with three private landowners to secure Right of Entry for the excavation work.

Staff and consultants held evening meetings on May 19th and May 24th to collect information useful to determine the best locations for three pedestrian/bike crossings of Highway 1. The meetings were very productive in gathering new information and validating the comments received initially from local agency representatives. While the focus of this process was within the Highway 1 project limits, between San Andreas/Larkin Valley Road and Morrissey Boulevard, recommendations were received for crossings south of Morrissey Boulevard as well.

Staff proposes to work with the consultants in review of the information collected from the stakeholders, and once again meet with local agency staff prior to making preliminary recommendations to the RTC. This work should be completed in the next two months.

Staff and the consultant team continue to work on a project newsletter marking the major milestones recently completed. The newsletter will provide a description project alternatives identified for analysis, a description of the environmental studies that will be performed, and milestone project schedule.

Bike/Pedestrian Crossing Meetings

A report on the meetings with bike and pedestrian interests group will be included in the next Highway 1 Status Report to the RTC. As discussed above, staff plans to meet with local agency representatives once again prior to presenting recommendations to the RTC.

Highway 1 Soquel/Morrissey Merge Lane Project

As reported at your last meeting, the Senate has passed its own version of the TEA-21 reauthorization bill and the next step will be formation of the Conference Committee. While the Senate bill does not contain earmarks for specific projects, Senators are expected to add earmarks in Conference Committee, and Senator Boxer is expected to be a member of the Committee. The Hwy 1 Project Development Team will discuss the preliminary design and environmental studies to be completed as part of the current work effort to be recognized as an Independent Utility Project.

At your last meeting, Micah Posner presented the Commission with petitions and letters opposing the Highway 1 Soquel/Morrissey Merge Lane Project. These materials are in three formats: two petitions and a form letter to Congressman Farr. One page form each format is attached (Attachment 1) and the full set of 50 pages with over 700 signatures is enclosed for commissioners (Attachment 2).

Highway 1 Construction Authority (HCA)

The HCA next meets on August 5, 2005, at 8:30 a.m. in the County Administrative Building.

SUMMARY

Updates on the Highway 1/17 Merge Lanes Project, the Highway 1 HOV Lane Widening Project Approval/Environmental Documentation (PA/ED) process, the Highway 1 Soquel/Morrissey Merge Lane Project, and the Highway 1 Construction Authority (HCA) are included in this staff report.

Attachments:

1. Sample of Petitions and Letters in Opposition to the Soquel/Morrissey Auxiliary Lane Project
2. Full Set of Petitions and Letters in Opposition to the Soquel/Morrissey Auxiliary Lane Project (enclosed separately for Commissioners)