

AGENDA: September 18, 2005

TO: Regional Transportation Commission – Policy Workshop
FROM: Kim Shultz, Senior Transportation Planner
REGARDING: Highway 1 Projects

RECOMMENDATIONS

Staff recommends that the Regional Transportation Commission:

1. Receive a Status Report on activities related to the Highway 1 project; and,
 2. Accept the Pedestrian/Bike Crossing Locations – Summary Report (Attachment 2) prepared by Nolte Associates and direct work to begin on preliminary design and environmental clearance for the three recommended pedestrian/bicycle crossings of Highway 1, taking into consideration the design considerations expressed by E&D TAC and ITAC members.
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BACKGROUND

The RTC initiated work on the current phase of the Highway 1 Widening/HOV Lane Project in June 2003. The Highway 1 Construction Authority (HCA), created in February 2004 to manage the implementation of the Highway 1 Project, decided in January 2005 that the RTC should retain management of the Project. The HCA continues to meet on a quarterly basis, staffed by the County Public Works Agency. In March 2005, Caltrans approved a list of alternatives 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. The environmental document for the project was approved in August 2002 and the final design of the project is nearly complete. Caltrans is working toward obtaining a funding allocation for this project at the September California Transportation Commission meeting.

Thanks to Congressman Farr, the new federal transportation bill includes \$2.9 million for the Highway 1 Soquel/Morrissey Auxiliary Lane Project. In September, staff will recommend a date, time and location for an evening public information open house and RTC public hearing on the project.

DISCUSSION

Highway 1/17 Merge Lanes Project

At your last meeting, the RTC heard a status report on the Highway 1/17 Merge Lanes Project from District Director Gregg Albright. At that time, Mr. Albright indicated that diligent efforts were being made by all involved parties to qualify this project for a funding allocation by the California Transportation Commission (CTC) in September, however, at this time the expected completion date of the engineering/design package is in November 2005. To avoid further postponement of this long delayed project, the RTC urged Caltrans to finish its work in time for the CTC's scheduled funding allocation in September. Staff will provide an oral update on the status of the project at the meeting.

As discussed at your August 4th meeting, the Highway 1/17 Merge Lanes project is programmed to receive \$39 million in FY05-06 STIP funds for construction. Therefore it is eligible for an allocation of STIP funds by the CTC. If it gets the allocation, construction could start in 2006.

However, the amount of FY05-06 STIP funds available for allocation is significantly less than the amount of funding programmed to projects. If tribal gaming bond revenues are not realized this fiscal year, the September CTC meeting is probably the last meeting when STIP funds for this fiscal year will be available. The situation might improve later in the fiscal year, but it is very uncertain. Any FY05-06 programmed projects which do not receive an allocation of funding this fiscal year will be folded into the 2006 STIP and will be delayed for an unknown period.

Other elements critical to qualifying this project for a funding allocation include:

1. **Completion of the Utility Relocation Plans and Right of Way Certification.** Mr. Albright reported at your August 4th meeting that PG&E had committed to submitting engineering plans for the relocation of their utility lines in September. Whether this submittal date provides adequate time for all other utilities to provide relocation information in time to qualify for the CTC funding allocation in September is unknown at this time.
2. **Execution of Cooperative Agreements** between Caltrans and the RTC, and between Caltrans and the City of Santa Cruz. This task will be completed in time for the CTC's September allocation. In the agreement with the RTC, Caltrans will provide \$100,000 for RTC staff to develop and implement focused traffic demand management (TDM) strategies for commuters traveling through the Highway 1/17 project area, similar to TDM services currently provided countywide. Staff will present the traffic demand management plan to the RTC prior to implementation.

While the agreement does not provide funding for expanded coverage of freeway service patrol (FSP) by the RTC, Caltrans has allocated \$70,000 in project traffic management funds for road clearance and towing to maintain traffic flow during

project construction. Staff will coordinate service delivery with Caltrans to enhance FSP coverage during the construction phase.

The agreement with the City of Santa Cruz is largely to implement a public awareness program for area residents and motorists in cooperation with Caltrans, and to provide additional police enforcement on surface streets along the project limits.

Highway 1 Widening/ HOV Lane Project –Project Approval/Environmental Documentation (PA/ED)

Traffic Analysis

As reported by Chris Metzger, Nolte Project Manager, in *the Highway 1 PA/ED Quarterly Progress Report* the critical path for completion of the PA/ED phase is once again the traffic modeling and operational analysis work. Monthly teleconference meetings on traffic issues have been initiated, in addition to the monthly Project Development Team meetings, to focus on this work element. Participants include key staff from Caltrans, AMBAG, RTC and the consultant team. Work is currently focusing on validating base year traffic projections from the Regional Travel Demand Model with actual counts collected by the consultant and development of the traffic operations model. The initial work in analyzing the project alternatives will focus on the Ramp Metering and Auxiliary Lane Alternative to measure the effectiveness of this alternative in meeting the stated Purpose and Need of the project.

Cultural Resources

As stated in Attachment 1 subsurface site excavation (Phase II work) can occur only after a preferred alternative has been selected to avoid destruction of prehistoric resources. The project team will review how this affects major work elements and will report changes to the current project schedule at the next Quarterly Progress Report.

In the meantime, we have secured a Right of Entry (ROE) on one of three private parcels to conduct the subsurface investigation as necessary and appropriate. Consistent with the practice of the County Real Estate Division, the ROE includes payment of \$1,000 to the property owner for any disruption that may be caused and any damage to the property that may occur as a direct result of the excavation. Payment will be made only in the event site excavation is necessary as determined by the selection of the preferred alternative.

Bike/Pedestrian Crossings

Chris Metzger, Nolte Project Manager, will present a report on the *Pedestrian/Bike Crossing Locations – Summary of the Selection Process*, including recommendations as to the best locations for three crossings of Highway 1 (see Attachment 2). A process to

re-evaluate the proposed crossing locations initially identified through Caltrans's conceptual design process was proposed by the Highway 1 Project Development Team in September 2004, and approved by the RTC in October (Exhibit 1 of Attachment 2).

Planning Process

An initial meeting was held in the fall with representatives from the county and cities along the Highway 1 project corridor to gather information on current and future non-motorized travel patterns and development proposals. The consultants prepared a base map identifying major origin/destination points including public schools, commercial, community service and recreational centers, and residential areas. Also noted on the base map were existing crossings and previously identified crossing locations, and existing bicycle paths serving the community.

With this base information and input from local agencies, a list of stakeholder groups and organizations was prepared and presented to the RTC for comment. Two evening working meetings were held and the stakeholders were invited to participate and provide input. A list of the groups and organizations invited to participate in the meetings is provided in Attachment 2, along with summaries of the information gathered at those meetings and list of actual attendees to those meetings.

The result of these meetings and field work by the consultant and staff was compiled by the consultants in the *Summary of the Selection Process* (Attachment 2). This document was once again made available to local agency staff for review and comment before referring the report to the RTC committees for review and comment.

RTC Committee Review and Comment

The Summary Report has been reviewed and approved by the Elderly & Disabled Technical Advisory Committee (E&D TAC), the Interagency Technical Advisory Committee (ITAC), and the Bike Committee.

Members of the E&D TAC expressed interest in design elements of the crossings including adequate width on the ramps so that two wheelchairs can pass, that sight distances on the ramps and crossings be appropriate for safe travel, and that designs be accessibility friendly, not just ADA compliant. In approving the recommendations in the *Summary Report* the committee formally requested that pedestrian and bike facilities leading to and from the crossing meet standards for safe and accessible travel for all potential users.

The ITAC expressed similar interest as the E&D TAC with the design elements of the crossings. ITAC members expressed greater concern with the overall costs of the crossings (estimated to cost from \$4 to \$8 million each) and their relative priority in an environment of severely constrained transportation revenues.

The Bike Committee unanimously approved the recommendations in the *Summary Report*. While commending the goal of improving bicycle access over Highway 1, Committee members did note that there may be higher priority bike improvement projects in the county given the estimated cost of the crossings.

Summary Report Recommendations

In keeping with the long term goals of the Highway 1 project, to reduce congestion within and across the corridor, the following locations are listed in the recommended priority for development/construction based on existing and future needs:

1. **Mar Vista Drive.** This location would provide a much needed link between Mar Vista Elementary School, Cabrillo College, and access to commercial areas on Soquel Drive for residents on the south side of the freeway, and improved access to the beach for residents located on the north side of the Highway 1.
2. **Chanticleer Avenue.** This location provides a safer alternative route for those currently using the Soquel Interchange to cross over Highway 1 to access commercial centers on either side of the highway and medical facilities on the north side.
3. **Trevethan Avenue.** This location provides direct connections between residential neighborhoods located on the opposite side of the highway from De Laveaga Elementary School, Branciforte Junior High School, and Loma Prieta High School. Also, crossing at the nearby Morrissey Boulevard overcrossing is challenging for cyclists and pedestrians because passage is legal only on one side of the overcrossing.

Additional comments regarding each of these crossings is provided on page 3 of the *Summary Report*, along with identification of additional bicycle and pedestrian needs on the Highway 1 corridor (see Attachment 2).

Next Steps

The scope of work for the Highway 1 Widening/HOV Lane project includes preliminary engineering design and preparation of environmental documentation for up to three pedestrian/bicycle crossings of the Highway 1 corridor. This work includes holding a neighborhood meeting in the immediate area of the respective crossing locations. Completion of the environmental documentation on these projects would improve the competitive position of the projects to attractive any discretionary funding that may become available at the regional, state, or federal level.

Proceeding with the preliminary engineering and environmental work will provide better cost estimates for the projects that currently range from \$4 to \$8 million.

Accordingly, staff recommends that the Regional Transportation Commission accept the Pedestrian/Bike Crossing Locations – Summary Report (Attachment 2) prepared by Nolte Associates and direct work to begin on preliminary design and environmental clearance for the three recommended pedestrian/bicycle crossings of Highway 1, taking into consideration the design considerations expressed by E&D TAC and ITAC members.

Highway 1 Construction Authority (HCA)

The HCA met on Friday, August 5th and received the *Quarterly Progress Report* on the Highway 1 Widening/HOV Lane Project and a presentation of the *Highway 1 Pedestrian/Bike Crossing Locations – Summary of the Selection Process*, by Chris Metzger, Nolte Project Manager. The HCA approved the recommendations in the *Summary Report* following discussion of the planning process.

On other items, the HCA took action to terminate the Excess Liability Program and Primary General Liability insurance policies at the recommendation of the County's Risk Manager and County Counsel. The policies were originally secured to provide general liability coverage for administrative duties related to an approved sales tax measure.

The HCA next meets on October 7, 2005, at 8:30 a.m. in the County Administrative Building.

SUMMARY

Updates on the Highway 1/17 Merge Lanes Project, Highway 1 Widening/HOV Lane Widening Project Approval/Environmental Documentation (PA/ED) process, and the Highway 1 Construction Authority (HCA) are included in this staff report. Included in the report on the Highway 1 PA/ED process is a report by the consultant project manager, Chris Metzger, on the *Pedestrian/Bike Crossing Locations – Summary of the Selection Process*, including recommendations as to the best locations for three crossings of Highway 1 (see Attachment 2). Staff recommends approval of the *Summary Report* and direct work to begin on preliminary design and environmental clearance for the three recommended pedestrian/bicycle crossings of Highway 1.

Attachments:

1. Correspondence from Carrie Bowen, Caltrans Environmental Chief regarding Phase II Archaeological Site Investigations.
2. Memorandum entitled, *Highway 1 Pedestrian/Bike Crossing Locations – Summary of the Selection Process*, from Nolte Associates, dated July 5, 2005.