

AGENDA: September 1, 2005

TO: Regional Transportation Commission
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. Direct staff and the Highway 1 consultant team to work with Caltrans in preparing for a public meeting on the Highway 1 Soquel/Morrissey Auxiliary Lane Project to be held the evening of November 17th, at the County Board of Supervisor's Chambers, as follows:
 - a. Open House/Project Information format beginning at 6:00 p.m.; followed by,
 - b. RTC Public Hearing to receive public comment on planning and programming concerns of the project beginning at 7:15 p.m.
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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 Project Approval/Environmental Documentation (PA/ED) phase of the project.

Thanks to Congressman Farr, the new federal transportation act includes \$2.9 million for the Highway 1 Soquel/Morrissey Auxiliary Lane Project. Work has begun on the preliminary design and environmental documentation for the project. An evening Open House/Project Information and RTC Public Hearing on the project are proposed in the fall.

DISCUSSION

Highway 1/17 Merge Lanes Project

As you know, the Highway 1/17 Merge Lanes Project is managed by Caltrans District-5. Caltrans is working toward obtaining a funding allocation for this project at the September California Transportation Commission meeting.

As reported at your August 18th meeting, significant progress has been made on the project elements necessary to qualify the project for a funding allocation. However, as of this writing none of the constraints have been completely cleared. The remaining critical elements which must be cleared in early September for an allocation by the CTC in late September are:

- 1. Completion of the engineering/design package.** Project plans are under accelerated final review both at the District and Headquarters levels.
- 2. Utility Relocation Plans.** The plans and estimates are needed from private utilities (i.e. PG&E, SBC, and Comcast) for the relocation of electrical and telecommunication lines and from the City of Santa Cruz for the relocation of sewer and water lines.
- 3. Cooperative Agreements.** Final details are being negotiated in the agreement with the City of Santa Cruz for the Public Awareness Campaign and mitigation to impacts caused by the highway construction process. The Cooperative Agreement with the RTC for implementation of Travel Demand Management strategies (TDM) has been signed.

Caltrans staff will provide an oral status report on efforts to qualify the Highway 1/17 Merge Lanes Project for a funding allocation at the September California Transportation Commission (CTC) meeting.

Highway 1 Soquel/Morrissey Auxiliary Lane Project

As directed at the August RTC meeting, the Commission will hold an Open House/Project Information meeting and RTC Public Hearing on the Soquel/Morrissey Auxiliary Lane Project. Staff and the consultant team propose that the meeting be held in the evening of November 17th.

The purpose of the dual formatted meeting is to allow an opportunity for members of the public to learn more about the project on a one-on-one basis with staff from Caltrans and the Highway 1 consultant team an hour before the formal RTC Public Hearing begins.

The Open House will be followed up by a formal Public Hearing before the RTC. There will be a presentation of the project proposal by the Highway 1 consultants and an

opportunity for the RTC and members of the public to provide comments on the project. All comments provided by the RTC or the public will be considered by the Project Development Team in preparation of the project's environmental document, and subsequent staff recommendations re: project planning and programming issues.

In addition to advertisements in papers of major circulation, meeting notifications will be sent to all interested parties included in the Caltrans and RTC data bases used for other Highway 1 public meetings. Arrangements have been made with Community TV to broadcast the Public Hearing.

Accordingly, staff recommends that the RTC direct staff to work with Caltrans in preparing for a public meeting on the Highway 1 Soquel/Morrissey Auxiliary Lane Project to be held the evening of November 17th, at the County Board of Supervisor's Chambers, and to include a project information open house beginning at 6:00 pm, followed by a public hearing to receive public comment on the project beginning at 7:15 pm.

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

Project Website

Staff is working with Caltrans and the Consultant Team to develop an independent project website for the Highway 1 Widening/HOV Lane Project, administered by Caltrans. The RTC website will continue to carry current information on the array of activities underway on the Highway 1 corridor, as reported in these Status Reports. A hot link will be established on the RTC website to automatically connect users to the new project oriented website for the Highway 1 widening project.

One of the reasons for setting up a separate website is to minimize any public confusion about the respective roles played by RTC and Caltrans on this project. As specified in the Cooperative Agreement, RTC is the project sponsor and serves as the project manager and contractor administrator for consultant services to complete the PA/ED process. Caltrans is the Lead Agency for environmental purposes as required by the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), and the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). Caltrans works closely with the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) to ensure compliance with NEPA. In this capacity, Caltrans is responsible for ensuring that all legal state and federal requirements are met in completing this project.

Housing the Highway 1 project website apart from the RTC website will also reduce the storage needs of the RTC server, and reduce staff duties in maintaining and updating material posted on the website.

Highway 1 Construction Authority (HCA)

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. Staff recommends holding an Open House/Project Information meeting and RTC Public Hearing on the Highway 1 Soquel/Morrissey Auxiliary Lane Project the evening of November 17th, beginning at 6:00 pm at the County Board of Supervisor's Chambers.

Prepared by: Kim Shultz