

AGENDA: January 5, 2006

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

RECOMMENDATIONS

This item is for information only.

BACKGROUND

On evening of November 17, 2005, Caltrans held an Open House and RTC held a public hearing to receive public input on the Highway 1 Soquel Avenue to Morrissey Boulevard Auxiliary Lane Project. At the conclusion of the Public Hearing, the RTC unanimously directed staff to develop a funding proposal for consideration as part of the Regional Transportation Improvement Program (RTIP).

DISCUSSION

Highway 1/17 Merge Lanes Project

This project is discussed in a separate item in this agenda.

Highway 1 Soquel Avenue to Morrissey Boulevard Auxiliary Lanes Project

Public Meeting

The Highway 1 Project Consultants are preparing a Summary Report of the November 17th Caltrans Open House/Public Information meeting and the RTC's Public Hearing on the Highway 1 Soquel Avenue to Morrissey Boulevard Auxiliary Lanes Project. The Summary Report is a formal part of the environmental documentation for the Auxiliary Lanes Project and will include information regarding public notification efforts, and all public comments provided in writing and verbally to project representatives at the Open House as well as at the RTC's Public Hearing.

Segmentation and Relation to the Highway 1 HOV Lane Project

A question was raised at the November Public Hearing by Commissioner Mark Stone whether the Auxiliary Lane Project raised an issue of "segmentation" in relation to the

Highway 1 corridor and work on the HOV Lane Project. “Segmentation” is a violation of environmental regulations and revolves around the issue of whether a project has independent utility with “logical termini” or beginning and end, and does not preclude nor cause unexpected side effects which require additional corrective action. This issue was discussed at the Highway 1 Project Development Team meeting on November 26th, with the recommended action that Caltrans and Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) representatives review the project history and make a collaborative determination consistent with federal and state environmental guidelines. As of the writing of this staff report, staff is still awaiting written confirmation from FHWA officials. Staff will provide any available update to this item at the RTC meeting.

Project Funding

Pursuant to direction by the RTC at the December RTC meeting, staff has prepared a funding proposal for completing the project development and construction of the Highway 1 Soquel Avenue to Morrissey Boulevard Auxiliary Lanes Project. Staff has been notified that the Caltrans District 5’s request for \$1.9 million in Interregional Transportation Improvement Program (ITIP) funds will not be granted in the current cycle due to cost increases in existing ITIP approved projects. This item is discussed in greater detail in a separate item in this agenda pertaining to the Regional Transportation Improvement Program (RTIP).

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

Public Information and Outreach

The staff is set to publish and distribute the first newsletter for the Highway 1 HOV Lane Widening Project later this month. Staff will broadly distribute the newsletter to all interested individuals and organizations that have expressed interest and/or participated in the Highway 1 planning effort to date. It will also be distributed to Transportation Funding Task Force member organizations.

Staff is working with Caltrans to create separate project websites for the Highway 1 HOV Lane Widening Project and the Soquel/Morrissey Auxiliary Lane Project on Caltrans District 5 website. As part of this process, the information on the RTC website will be updated and hot links established directly with the Caltrans website in a manner that reflects the respective roles of the RTC as sponsoring agency for the project, and Caltrans/FHWA serving as lead agencies responsible for approval of the environmental documents.

Development of Project Alternatives

RTC staff and Highway 1 consultants met with Caltrans engineers in San Luis Obispo in mid-December to begin the process of identifying acceptable design exceptions that will

constitute the Reduced Geometry Alternative. The goal of this process is to define a reduced footprint for the HOV Lane build alternative that minimizes community and environmental impacts, and reduces construction costs without compromising traffic operations or safety. This alternative would enable the addition of the HOV lane with reduced highway widening and would require fewer retaining walls and/or fewer structure replacements and/or less right-of-way because the existing roadway cross-section would more nearly accommodate the proposed new cross-section.

Once the Reduced Geometry alternative has been defined to a 90 percent level of certainty, environmental studies can be completed, including: noise studies, wetlands delineation, and biological studies. The Highway 1 consultants expect to be at this point by the Spring of 2006. Ongoing analysis of traffic operations will be coordinated with these discussions and help to define the final geometric considerations including proper ramp and arterial lane configurations at interchanges.

Generally, the Reduced Geometry Alternative can achieve anywhere from 15 to 25 percent cost reduction in comparison to the Standard Geometric Alternative.

SUMMARY

Updates are provided in this staff report the Highway 1 Soquel Avenue to Morrissey Boulevard Auxiliary Lanes Project and the Highway 1 HOV Lane Widening - Project Approval/Environmental Documentation (PA/ED) process. Staff has prepared a funding proposal for completing the project development and construction of the Highway 1 Soquel Avenue to Morrissey Boulevard Auxiliary Lanes Project which is discussed in greater detail in a separate item in this agenda pertaining to the Regional Transportation Improvement Program (RTIP). The Highway 1/17 Merge Lanes project is discussed in a separate agenda item.