

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

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February 16, 2007

George Dondero, Executive Director
Santa Cruz County Transportation Commission (SCCRTC)
1523 Pacific Avenue
Santa Cruz, California 95060-3911

Dear Mr. Dondero:

RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS RAISED DURING THE JANUARY 11, 2007 BOARD MEETING

This is in response to issues raised to the Department of Transportation (Caltrans) during the January 11, 2007 SCCRTC Board Meeting.

Issue: During the discussion regarding amending the 2006 Regional Transportation Improvement Program, Commissioner Coonerty recommended including the Scott and Waddell bridge replacements as those of regional significance.

Response: Caltrans has identified the bridges as structurally deficient and agrees that identifying replacements as regionally significant is appropriate. A Project Scope Summary Report (PSSR) was been approved in 2005 and both bridges will be submitted as one project for programming in the 2008 SHOPP.

In response to new information since approval of the PSSR, Caltrans has initiated additional studies to determine the appropriate range of alternatives that must be analyzed in the environmental review process. This work is being conducted in close coordination with key resource agency staff such as NOAA Fisheries, the California Department of Fish & Game, and the California Coastal Commission.

If the project successfully competes for funding in the 2008 SHOPP, the Project Approval & Environmental Design (PA&ED) phase will begin in July of 2008. The Department's responsibility to replace the bridges will limit the scope of the project in accordance with our stewardship responsibilities and in compliance with State and environmental laws and regulations.

Participation by the RTC in this project could be significant in two ways. First, it would make the project more competitive in its bid to receive SHOPP funds, and second, it would make it possible to include *enhancement* features with the project. Enhancements are generally above and beyond avoidance measures and project mitigation features, and would not eligible for SHOPP funding.

250-1

Mr. George Dondero

February 16, 2007


Page 2

Question: During the Caltrans year in review, concern was raised regarding the lack of median planting along Highway 1 in Aptos. A status on planting was requested.

Response: Following the construction of the median barrier from Freedom Boulevard to Rio Del Mar this past summer, the Department planted seeds for native wildflowers of various colors and low-growing native grasses in the soil of both inside shoulders (between the barrier and northbound/southbound highway). The plants are drought resistant and fast growing, however, due to the low levels of rainfall, the planting has had a slow start. The area should eventually thrive, and look similar to the planting that was completed along Highway 1 between Airport Boulevard and Buena Vista.

In addition, the Department recently planted the northbound outside shoulder (between the freeway and Soquel Drive) with groundcover and 1 gallon and 5 gallon native plants. The Department worked with members of the community to create an attractive, fully landscaped corridor that is aesthetically pleasing. Although the recent freeze in the area had a negative impact on the new plants, the Department is hopeful that the plants will again flourish this spring.

Sincerely,



RICHARD KRUMHOLZ
District Director

c: Santa Cruz County

250-2