

AGENDA: September 6, 2007

TO: Regional Transportation Commission

FROM: Kim Shultz, Senior Transportation Planner

REGARDING: Highway 1 Projects Status Update

RECOMMENDATIONS

Staff recommends that the Regional Transportation Commission accept the Quarterly Progress Report (Attachment 1) from the consultant for the Highway 1 HOV Lane Project and the Soquel/Morrissey Auxiliary Lane Project, and receive a status report on other activities related to the Highway 1 projects.

BACKGROUND

The 1986 Regional Transportation Plan identified the widening of Highway 1 as a high priority project to address growing congestion along the corridor. In 2003, the Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission (RTC), in cooperation with Caltrans and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), initiated preliminary design and environmental studies (referred to as the Project Approval/Environmental Documentation (PA/ED) phase) to widen Highway 1 to six through lanes from Morrissey Boulevard in Santa Cruz to Larkin Valley Road in Aptos. The new lanes, one in each direction, would be freeway lanes that are restricted to vehicles carrying two or more people, including buses and emergency vehicles, during designated times of the day, usually during peak periods. For additional background and current information on the project, visit the project website at: www.sccrtc.org/hov

In 2002, Caltrans identified auxiliary lanes between Soquel Avenue and Morrissey Boulevard as a relatively low cost operational improvement that would provide congestion relief to the busiest segment of Highway 1. Full funding through construction has been programmed for this project with the inclusion of \$2.9 million in federal funds secured with the assistance of Congressman Sam Farr, \$16.2 million in Proposition 1B – Corridor Mobility Improvement Account (CMIA) transportation bond funds, and regional transportation improvement funds. The preliminary design/environmental review phase of the project began in January 2007. For additional background and current information on the project, visit the project website at: www.sccrtc.org/SoquelMorrissey.

DISCUSSION

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

Chris Metzger, Nolte Project Manager, will make an oral presentation of the Quarterly Progress Report (Attachment 1) for the Highway 1 HOV Lane Project. The highlight of the current reporting period is approval by Caltrans of the Highway Operations Report in early August. While this work element has been the critical path of the PA/ED process to date, work continued on the engineering design and environmental analysis, such that the consultant team did submit the administrative draft of the environmental document and project report, including preliminary design plans, to Caltrans on August 27th. These documents will be reviewed simultaneously by Caltrans and the RTC, prior to the scheduled distribution to the public in Spring 2008.

With this milestone completed, the critical path for completion of the PA/ED process is now the investigation of cultural resources, specifically the potential excavation of archaeological sites along the corridor. Current guidelines prohibit disturbing sites until a preferred project alternative has been selected and a determination made that potential archaeological resources are in jeopardy. In the event archaeological resources are discovered a mitigation plan will be developed to preserve those resources.

The scheduled completion date of the PA/ED process remains Winter 2009/2010. Overall phasing/development schemes to expedite construction, should funding become available, are being considered by the project team and will be discussed with the Commission in the Fall.

Engineering

The engineering consultants have completed the design plans that combine the “best” aspects of the previous Standard Design and Reduced Width HOV project alternatives into a single HOV Build Alternative. The new HOV Lane Alternative includes standard inside median and outside shoulders where there is sufficient right-of-way width (generally in the southern section of the project), but would seek design exceptions for a narrower inside median and/or outside shoulders and would incorporate retaining walls and other design techniques to minimize impacts where the right-of-way is narrow. With this approach the HOV Build Alternative reduces impacts to right-of-way, adjoining properties, wetlands and other sensitive environmental areas, and ancillary project elements such as bridges and parallel roadways.

Caltrans has provided preliminary feedback on the design proposal and a more thorough analysis will be conducted with the benefit of the Traffic Operations Report and draft environmental documents. Approval of design exceptions to minimize impacts must be assessed on a case by case basis to ensure no compromises are made to motorist safety. Formal approval of design exceptions will be pursued only after the selection of the preferred project alternative when the full “Geometric Approval Drawings” are submitted to Caltrans in early 2009.

Draft Environmental Document

The technical environmental studies for the Highway 1 HOV Lane project were completed during this period and work has focused on development of the administrative draft Environmental Impact Report/Environmental Assessment (EIR/EA) for Caltrans and RTC’s review beginning in September. Following this initial review, and response to any comments Caltrans and RTC may have, representatives of the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA)

will review the documents. After the FHWA's authorization, the draft environmental documents will be released to the public and local agencies for review and comment. Caltrans and FHWA will review the draft environmental documents to ensure thoroughness and compliance with current environmental requirements. FHWA authorization to release the draft environmental document is expected in late February/early March 2008.

Release of the draft environmental document is expected in late Spring 2008. Following the public review period the Project Development Team (PDT) will respond to comments and make any necessary revisions to the draft environmental documents. With the benefit of the updated environmental information, it is expected that the RTC will be able to make a recommendation to Caltrans as to the preferred alternative in September 2008. Caltrans, as owner/operator of the highway, formally selects the preferred alternative following RTC's action.

Public Outreach

In preparation for the release of the draft environmental documents, the PDT recommended an outreach program to provide broad based information on the project as well as focused discussion on specific issues and community interests. Work is now complete on the second project newsletter. The first newsletter was published in the Summer of 2006. Since that time considerable progress has been made on the project, including: refinement of the project alternatives and engineering design details, including the location of proposed auxiliary lanes for both alternatives. The Spanish version of the newsletter is currently in production, with printing and distribution of both the English and Spanish version to follow in mid September. The project newsletter will be used to present project information and solicit interest from community organizations.

Staff and the project consultants have also begun work to set up a speaker's bureau and presentation material to conduct focus group meetings with various organizations and associations. Target groups would include neighborhood associations, business organizations, social/civic organizations, and special interest groups. Staff anticipates scheduling presentations beginning in the Fall of 2007 and concluding just prior to the release of the draft environmental document. Spanish speakers will be available for presentations.

Separate public hearing(s) will be conducted in the Spring/Summer of 2008 in association with the release of the draft environmental document.

Highway 1 Soquel to Morrissey Auxiliary Lanes Project

The Project Development Team (PDT), working closely with the Caltrans design and construction engineers on the Highway 1/17 Merge Lanes project, has agreed to eliminate one of the auxiliary lane design alternatives to avoid impacts to soundwalls just constructed as part of the Highway 1/17 project. Caltrans has provided conceptual agreement on the basic geometry for the preferred alternative. The PDT is now focused on defining what improvements can be made to the Morrissey Boulevard Interchange within the existing project budget and schedule.

The traffic operations analysis is currently underway analyzing three scenarios: No Project (Baseline), Auxiliary Lanes only, and the Enhanced Project (includes auxiliary lanes and reconfiguration of the northbound ramps at the Morrissey interchange). The traffic operations analysis is required before some of the environmental technical studies can be conducted (ex. air quality and noise). To the extent possible, environmental analysis conducted for the HOV Lane Project will be utilized on the Auxiliary Lanes Project.

Once the extent of improvements that can be made at the Morrissey interchange as part of this project are determined, staff proposes to hold an Informational Open House meeting for the benefit of the neighboring community. Staff anticipates holding this meeting in the Winter 2008.

This project is under close scrutiny by the California Transportation Commission (CTC), as are all projects receiving Proposition 1B –Transportation Bond funds. Caltrans staff in Sacramento are working on a “Bond Accountability” website to provide full public disclosure on the status of projects through the development process. RTC and Caltrans District staff are working together to ensure the most accurate information is reported.

Highway 1 Construction Authority (HCA)

The Highway 1 Construction Authority (HCA) was created in 2004 for the purpose of managing the implementation of the Highway 1 HOV Lane Project. In 2005, the HCA directed that the RTC retain management of the Highway 1 HOV Lane project until funds are secured for design and construction. The HCA, staffed by the Santa Cruz County Public Works Agency, convenes periodically to review progress of the Highway 1 projects.

The HCA met on Monday, August 27, 2006, and approved an operating budget for Fiscal Year 2007/08 and received the Quarterly Progress Report for the Highway 1 Projects from the project consultants. Discussion focused on the design and operational elements of the Soquel Interchange that would be reconstructed as part of the HOV Lane project alternative. The next meeting of the HCA is tentatively scheduled for December 2007.

Highway 1/17

Caltrans will provide a status report on the Highway 1/17 Merge Lanes Project, currently under construction.

SUMMARY

Chris Metzger, Nolte Project Manager, will make an oral presentation of the Quarterly Progress Report ([Attachment 1](#)) for the Highway 1 HOV Lanes Project and the Highway 1 Soquel Avenue to Morrissey Boulevard Auxiliary Lanes Project, for the period April 2007 though July 2007. The next Quarterly Progress Report is scheduled for December 2007.

Attachments:

1. Quarterly Progress Report on the Highway 1 HOV Lane Project and the Highway 1 Soquel/Morrissey Auxiliary Lane Project, dated August 20, 2007.

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