

TO: Regional Transportation Commission
FROM: Kim Shultz, Senior Transportation Planner
REGARDING: Highway 1 Project Status Report

RECOMMENDATIONS

Staff recommends that the Regional Transportation Commission:

1. Accept the Quarterly Progress Report (Attachment 1) from the consultant for the Soquel/Morrissey Auxiliary Lanes Project and the Highway 1 HOV Lanes Project; and,
 2. Approve a revision to the scope of improvements for the Highway 1 Soquel/Morrissey Auxiliary Lanes Project to provide pedestrian improvements on the north side of the Morrissey Interchange without changing the current design of the northbound ramps.
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BACKGROUND

The 1986 Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) 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 add high occupancy vehicle (HOV) lanes to Highway 1 from Morrissey Boulevard in Santa Cruz to Larkin Valley Road in Aptos. The HOV 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. In late 2005, the RTC received \$2.9 million in federal funds secured with the assistance of Congressman Sam Farr, which allowed preliminary work to begin on the project. In March 2007, the RTC was successful in securing \$16.2 million in Corridor Mobility Improvement Account (CMIA) funds for the construction of the Soquel/Morrissey Auxiliary Lanes Project. The CMIA grant together with other funding sources in the Regional Transportation Improvement Program (RTIP) allowed the RTC to program full funding through construction for this project.

DISCUSSION

Highway 1 Soquel/Morrissey Auxiliary Lanes Project

Parag Mehta, Nolte Project Manager, will make an oral presentation of the Progress Report ([Attachment 1](#)) for the Highway 1 Soquel/Morrissey Auxiliary Lanes Project. The highlight of the current reporting period is the engineering and project management work associated with proposed modification of the Morrissey Boulevard Interchange as part of the Auxiliary Lanes Project.

Morrissey Boulevard Interchange

The size of the Corridor Mobility Improvement Account (CMIA) grant for the Soquel/Morrissey Auxiliary Lanes Project allowed staff to explore the potential of expanding the scope of the project to include modification of the northbound side of the Morrissey Boulevard Interchange. The goal of the expanded scope of improvements was to improve existing conditions for motorists, pedestrians, and bicyclists. As the project development team began exploring various design options, it became clear that Caltrans approval of the more ambitious and desired changes to the interchange would significantly impact the project delivery schedule, a critical element in maintaining eligibility in the CMIA funding program.

In September, RTC staff and the consultant team presented two possible alternatives to Santa Cruz City staff for review and comment. At that time, City staff advised the project team that recent improvements made to the northbound off-ramp at Morrissey, as part of the Highway 1/17 Merge Lanes project, had made that section of the interchange much more manageable for pedestrians, bicyclists, and motorists. Moreover, staff was sensitized to the impact the current construction was having on the adjacent community which would be prolonged with any subsequent reconstruction of the ramps as part of the Auxiliary Lanes project. Furthermore, the northbound ramps would have to be yet again reconstructed in the event the Highway 1 HOV Lanes Project is funded.

City of Santa Cruz staff requested this issue be presented to the City Transportation Commission (CTC), and subsequently to the City Council which acted on the item on November 13th. The project consultant prepared a memorandum outlining the design options and potential impacts to the overall project schedule ([Attachment 2](#)). Deliberations at the CTC meeting included discussions regarding the respective design options and scheduling versus funding conflicts, improved operation under existing conditions, community impacts and overall costs to the tax payer.

In taking final action, the Santa Cruz City Council requested that no change be made to the current design of the northbound ramps, but that the Auxiliary Lanes Project provide pedestrian improvements on the north side of the Morrissey Interchange, as described in the City staff report ([Attachment 3](#)). These improvements are relatively low cost and would further improve conditions for pedestrians and bicyclists at this location.

The improvements requested by the City are consistent with the original intent of improving the north side of the Morrissey Boulevard Interchange, and eliminating the proposed modifications to the northbound ramps will greatly assist efforts to accelerate delivery of this project. Accordingly, **staff recommends that the RTC approve a revision to the scope of improvements for the Highway 1 Soquel/Morrissey Auxiliary Lanes Project to provide pedestrian improvements on the north side of the Morrissey Interchange without changing the current design of the northbound ramps.**

Environmental Documentation

Environmental studies have begun based on the one build alternative for the auxiliary lanes portion of the project, previously reviewed and approved by Caltrans. Subject to the above action, the environmental study will assume no changes will be made to the north bound ramps at the Morrissey Boulevard Interchange. While the consultant team will make the maximum possible use of environmental studies performed for the Highway 1 HOV Lanes Project, Caltrans has required new noise and air quality studies be conducted for the Auxiliary Lanes Project.

The environmental document is scheduled to be circulated with a public hearing late in the summer of 2008. Completion of the environmental process is scheduled for Spring 2009.

Public Outreach

With the recommendation to not change the Morrissey Boulevard Interchange, the project scope is now consistent with the proposal shown at the public hearing in the Fall of 2005, and subsequent open house meetings focused on the Highway 1 HOV Lane Project in the Fall of 2006. A formal public hearing will be held during the circulation of the Draft Environmental Document next summer. Project information on the Auxiliary Lanes Project will be included in the Speakers Bureau presentations for the Highway 1 HOV Lane Project.

Highway 1 HOV Lanes Project

Chris Metzger, Nolte Project Manager, will make an oral presentation of the Progress Report (Attachment 1) for the Highway 1 HOV Lanes Project. The highlight of the current reporting period is the submittal of the administrative draft environmental documents and engineering plans to Caltrans for review, and the corresponding comments received from Caltrans.

Environmental Documents

The Administrative Draft Environmental Impact Report/Environmental Assessment and all technical studies were submitted to Caltrans for review in August 2007. Comments have been received on some of the reports and revisions to these documents are underway as appropriate.

The California Air Resources Board (CARB) has not yet issued methodology for evaluating greenhouse gases at a project level. However, the environmental document will address this issue through a qualitative analytical approach, in conformance with Caltrans' guidance.

The project team is proposing to meet with the California Coastal Commission (CCC) as the southern segment of this project falls within the jurisdiction of the CCC. An initial meeting was held in January 2007 to introduce the project and identify areas of CCC concerns. The upcoming meeting, proposed in January/February, would further discussion with CCC staff as to the geometric plans for the respective project alternatives, and preliminary assessment of project impacts and mitigation measures.

Engineering Plans

The engineering plans for the project alternatives were submitted to Caltrans in August 2007 and comments received in late October 2007. The goal is to provide sufficient engineering detail to evaluate operational conditions and accurately measure environmental impacts with minimal time and expense in developing engineering drawings ultimately not included in the preferred alternative. After selection of the preferred alternative, the consultant team will provide all the design detail necessary for formal approval of the design exceptions in the proposed project.

As part of the comments received, Caltrans engineers in Sacramento have determined that the proposed design for the reconstruction of the Soquel Interchange is unacceptable. Multiple geometric configurations for the Soquel Interchange were developed and reviewed with the County and Caltrans District staff. The most recent option provides continued access to Commercial Way from the Highway 1 northbound off-ramp, but impacts parking spaces at the retail site immediately adjacent to the ramp. Caltrans has stated this design is unacceptable, stating it is an "isolated ramp." Previous options were unacceptable to the County because they did not provide direct access to Commercial Way. The consultant team, RTC and County staff are preparing material to appeal Caltrans decision with the prospect of raising this issue to the management level.

Project Budget

As previously discussed, it will be necessary to add funds to the consultant contract to complete the Environmental Document. The consultant team and RTC staff are discussing proposed scope amendments and funding needs to complete the current PA/ED process. Staff will present a proposed contract amendment at the January RTC meeting consistent with the funds programmed in the 2006 State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) Augmentation for the Highway 1 HOV Lane project. At that time, staff will also present an estimate of the funding needs to complete all aspects of the PA/ED process, including retaining On-Call Right of Way consultants and conducting the required value analysis for the project. The additional funding needs will be included for your consideration as part of the 2008 Regional Transportation Improvement Program (RTIP).

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 is scheduled to meet on Monday, December 17, 2007 at the 8:30 a.m. in the County Supervisor's Chambers.

SUMMARY

Parag Mehta and Chris Metzger, Nolte Project Managers, will make oral presentations of the Progress Reports (Attachment 1) for the Highway 1 Soquel/Morrissey Auxiliary Lanes Project and the Highway 1 HOV Lanes Project, respectively. Staff recommends that the RTC approve a revision to the scope of improvements for the Highway 1 Soquel/Morrissey Auxiliary Lanes Project to provide pedestrian improvements on the north side of the Morrissey Interchange without changing the current design of the northbound ramps. This recommendation is consistent with a recommendation of the Santa Cruz city staff (Attachment 3) and subsequent action taken by the City Council on November 13, 2007.

Attachments:

1. Memorandum from Nolte Associates providing a Progress Report on the Highway 1 Projects, dated November 15, 2007.
2. Memorandum from Nolte Associates regarding Improvements at Morrissey Boulevard Ramps, dated October 24, 2007.
3. Santa Cruz City Council Agenda Report, Morrissey Interchange Alternatives, for the meeting of November 13, 2007.

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